

THE LAUGHING BUDDHA



THE LEGEND OF THE LAUGHING BUDDHA

The Buddha who attained "Enlightenment" long centuries since in the valley of the Ganges is not the only one to bear that name. Many other Buddhas, we are told, appeared in the countless Kalpas that antedated his day. And others—at least one other—are to come. The Buddha, himself, while on earth, visited this Buddha-that-is-to-be in the high Tushita heaven. There the latter still abides awaiting his appointed time, just 5000 years after the first Buddha attained unto Nirvana. When he comes, he will usher in an age of Boundless Happiness.

Of old, he was called in Pali annals, Maitreya; now, as the Chinese later transliterated it, Mi-lei-Fo, that is, the Merciful-One, the Beneficent. Tradition says an artist was once permitted to visit him in his Paradise. He returned to report that the Coming One was a being of gigantic form towering some sixty feet in height, and also a Buddha of might and majesty. The Chinese vision of one impersonating future peace, prosperity, and the perfect life has chosen to picture him otherwise. He is, therefore, almost invariably as here depicted—big, benign, beaming over with good living and good will. Occidentals, therefore, have termed him The Laughing Buddha.

He is one of the most popular gods of the great pantheon and may be found all over China in plaster and in porcelain, in bronze and in good brown sugar (for the children). He is also found, as in this story, carved lovingly in the living rock with children rollicking about his great bluff old body.

Only the Orient knows the hopes that lie hidden in this Coming-One. This story would reveal such a soul.

THE LAUGHING BUDDHA

A TALE OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE IN
WESTERN CHINA

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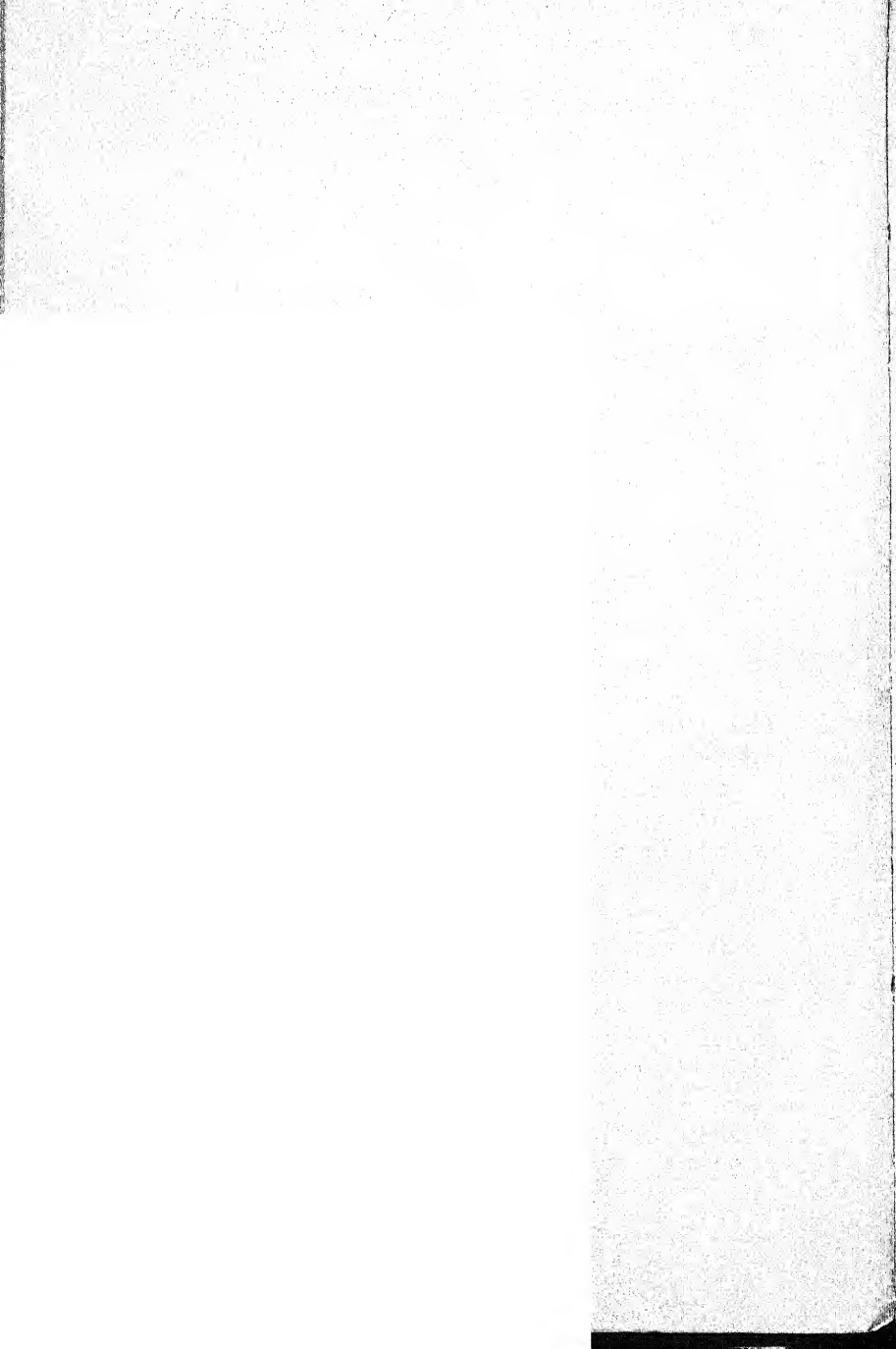
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I

A ROBBER RAID

LITTLE LEW-CHEE crept forth cautiously. He listened but could hear nothing. Yet surely his mother had called him. Back in the dark tunnel of the old coalpit he felt certain he had heard her cry for help. He called out timidly but no answer came.

Then he advanced a few steps farther and peered into the darkness. On the horizon, flickering torches crept over the mountain crest. He stumbled back half-stunned with terror. The robber-band had not yet gone, or, if going, some might still be lurking in the valley. He lay there, he knew not how long. Then again she called. He felt his way once more to the mouth of the tunnel, and again all was stillness.

This time there was no flare to break the darkness and he crept farther out. Down in the valley below he could see an occasional flicker, a small, red tongue that shot out here and there, then died away into fantastic figures that danced in the darkness. These fitful flames he knew. They marked the spot where a few hours before had been his home. The fantastic figures, were they fact or fancy? The mother's appeal for aid still echoed in his heart. "Mother," he called out piteously, "I hear you calling, but I cannot see you! Mother!"

Down by the smouldering ruins, some one seemed to answer. Slowly he made his way thither through

shale and boulders, brushwood and corn-stalks. Now, from an overhanging cliff he could see all, through the darkness, although but dimly. Of the old home only a wisp of smoke remained. No, something moved! It was his old dog Lion. He was about to call him when he saw a human form. The latter brandished a stick and in a low voice ordered the dog away. Feeling along the edge of the cliff he crept closer. He could then see three figures—no, four. Three were seated on the ground in a semicircle. The fourth was lying at full length in their midst. What could it mean? Were the robbers guarding one of their dead? Or was it his mother?

Something touched his hand. He sprang to his feet. It was the old dog, but he recognized the fact too late. His foot slipped, and with a cry he fell forward. A hand seized him, but the grip slowly loosened.

"It's the small son," said a voice, and the boy recognized a neighbour.

"Yes. It's Lew-chee," said another. "One, then, still lives!"

The scene was a secluded valley, on the slopes of the far-flung Himalayas. Not on their southern side, where they slowly incline toward India, but on their wild, eastern border where, from Tibet, the Top of the World, they tumultuously tumble down to touch the plains of ancient China. These grim glens are still sealed to the sight of the globe-trotter, and never echoed to the tramp of the troopers of the great Raj. Here leopard and tiger still prowl; the wild boar has his runways; robber bands have their succession of retreats; ever on, ever up, to where the precipice donkey munches mosses by the edge of glistening

glaciers. Here, "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife," Buddhist priests, long centuries since, built their now tottering temples, and here the pressure and strife of life have forced flotsam and jetsam from the farm and street on the great plain, to fight with rocks, rains and robbers, in the ageless feud for food. Here, remnants of ancient races still till secluded valleys, and scions of soldier-bands sent hither to guard the passes now mingle, a promiscuous posterity.

From these latter came the family of little Lew-chee. Somewhere in the dim past his fathers had formed part of a soldier settlement, recruited, it is said, from the remote and rugged north. The family name, Lew, is certainly among the most ancient and honourable in Chinese annals. Was it not the house of Lew who ruled the land in the golden days of the Han dynasty at the dawn of the Christian era? And is not the great Lew-bee, the hero of the undying romance of the Three Kingdoms? But that glory had long departed from this wind-blown seed of the great stock. Some ancestor, or successive generations of them, had succeeded in building up a small platform of rough stone, high enough and strong enough to withstand the sudden freshets of summer, as they tore down the valley, and on it had erected successive sorts of abode. In little Lew-chee's day, this was represented by a squalid shack standing round three sides of a small square. Save for a few slender posts for support, the whole structure, sides and roof, was made of cornstalks. There were neither windows nor floors. The upper room which held the straw beds, had a door. The side rooms were open—mere sheds. One housed a small iron pot, a table and two benches, and so was

the kitchen. The other gave shelter to an old hen and her half-dozen chickens, the black, long-snouted family pig, and a small hive of bees, the latter housed in a short piece of hollow log, slung to one side of the shed.

Even this wretched hut was not now the property of the family. It, or its predecessors, had been, in palmier days. So had the upper slopes of the tiny valley. But misfortunes had come at different stages of their history. Sometimes it was drought and the corn died on the parched hillsides. Sometimes the floods swept the seed, together with the scant soil, heartlessly down the valley. Sometimes early frost, or locusts, or wild boars, or sickness, or soldiers or robbers wrought the havoc. Sometimes it had been all of these in succession, so that, gradually, the few acres of cornland and woodland had gone in loans and mortgages to the temple in the neighbouring valley.

Thus Lew-chee's father was only a tenant. But this was the condition of the majority of his neighbours, so why complain? Moreover, he knew no better, so struggled patiently on. He was at least big and strong. His wife, a patient little woman, who had been almost pretty in her youth, and his daughter, now a girl of fifteen, could hoe the corn, cut the firewood and cook the food—when there was such. They had had seven sons. The three eldest had been apprenticed to shopkeepers down on the plain. The next three had died when cholera swept the small valley. The youngest was with them still. His mother called him "Gold baby," for a priest had said that that was his astrological element. But his father and family simply called him "Number Seven" (in Chinese

"Chee"). So as little Lew-chee, that is 'son "Number Seven," he was known throughout the valley.

As a child, Lew-chee had crawled about the dirty floors, played with the chickens, pig and dog, fallen off the low stone terrace into the stream to be rescued just in time, or ridden on his big sister's back through stream-beds, brushwood and cornfields. At other times he had toddled after his elder brothers and slept to his mother's strange lullabys or been borne by her as a special favour to the old temple just over the hill there to kneel with her before the big, beaming, buxom form of the idol known as the "Laughing Buddha," while she bent low, offering meagre bundles of burning paper and new vows of motherhood. Later, he had run about with his dog chasing cicadas, birds and squirrels. Now, a growing lad of eight, he hoed a little, fed the pig, and even went at times with his father as he cut firewood or dug coal from an old tunnel, then carried them in great bundles upon his back far down to the plain below.

The small pittance thus earned, brought back to the shack small pickings of salt and oil, for cooking, an occasional bowl of rice and, now and then, moieties of tobacco. In the summer this sufficed. It was harder in the spring and autumn, and in the winter it was indeed bitter; for the snow then lay over the ground, freezing bare feet, and the winds swept through the wretched cornstalk shack, making the nights cruel for backs covered only with one badly-patched cotton garment. But prospects were brighter and hope high. The eldest son had almost completed his apprenticeship as a dyer and would then add something to the family funds. Soon the other boys would follow. Moreover, a family in a nearby valley had offered two

pieces of real silver for the pretty sister in the autumn. That was almost satisfactory—quite so indeed—if they would raise the price just a trifle. And then there was the pig! This year little Lew-chee had been diligent in gathering broken corn, digging roots and carrying plentiful supplies of water, so the pig was big with promise. He would surely mean more clothing, and, possibly, even a wadded quilt or two. That would be comfort, even luxury.

Then one night, just after midnight, disaster had come upon them like an avalanche. There was a sudden demoniacal yell and the deafening discharge of firearms. The dog which lay beside little Lew-chee on the straw in a corner, woke with a yelp, and leaped through a hole in the side of the shack.

"Who is there?" demanded Lew-chee's father, as he sprang towards the door.

For answer the frail door came down with a crash. There was a flash of a torch or something bright, right in his father's face. His sister screamed and the boy, squirming through the hole the dog had used, wriggled his way to the back of the shack. But the robber-band were prepared for such eventualities. Two figures with torches and swords guarded the rear that no one might escape. One had seized a chicken and was busy tying its feet. The other espied the boy and rushed upon him sword in hand. He had scarce seized the child when something intervened. The dog, with a savage snarl, sprang upon the bully, gripping him by the shoulder. Quickly the boy squirmed himself loose, and leaving his small, upper garment in the robber's hand, fled into the corn. Both robbers pursued him, but the dog, the darkness and the desperation of fear fought for him. With beating heart he

scrambled through the brushwood, over crags, behind great boulders and through thickets until reaching the mouth of the old coal-pit, he paused for breath.

Below him, in the unfortunate hut he had called home, all was turmoil. He thought he heard his sister scream once, but the sound was drowned by the barking of the dog, the squealing of the pig, and the wild shouts of men or demons. Torches were flickering all about. There must have been a dozen—twenty. Soon a brighter light sprang up. For a moment it shot straight upward from the end of the shack, then leaped in a flash to the roof. The dry cornstalks flamed for a moment, bits of leaves whirled gaily in the midst of a pillar of smoke, then with much crackling and a shower of sparkling spray the roof fell in and the home was gone. He had stood bewildered. Now he fled terror-stricken into the interior of the tunnel. There only the pounding of his temples disturbed the stillness. No! As he listened his mother's cry for aid had come. Once! . . . Twice! . . . and he had crept down the crags to the ruined home!

Slowly that night, from the three neighbours, he learned the remainder of the story. There was little to tell. They had heard the shouting and firing and had come running, bringing old spears and a fuse-lit shotgun. But who dared to attack a foe so formidable and relentless? After the torches had departed, they had ventured in.

"Who is this lying so silently on the ground?" they asked the boy. "Is it your mother?"

"No, my father!" He had evidently been shot at the very beginning of the struggle.

"Did you hear my mother calling?" Lew-chee asked them.

"Yes, more than once, over by the brook-side," was the reply. "But who dare interfere against such odds?"

"My sister, too?"

"Yes, surely, she is gone. All are gone—the pig, the chickens, even the small iron pot, the table and the benches!"

The little boy sobbed piteously. The old dog sought in vain to comfort him. The three men smoked philosophically. The father lay very still. From across the darkness of the night came random shots!

Slowly the day dawned. It was the threshold of a new life for little Lew-chee. Other neighbours came with the dawn. Some of them whispered together, but none dare speak openly as to the perpetrators of the tragedy. Who knew what ears might be listening, or what vengeance might be wreaked upon him who ventured even on making surmises? Discretion lay in professions of profound ignorance. A few with a little more daring, and under pretence of having business that way or with the hope of picking up a few discarded articles, followed the trail of the marauders. They found little but trampled corn, a few chicken feathers, a torn bit of a garment, and then suddenly by the brook's edge the mother's dishevelled body. She was dead! No, she breathed still! They called for help and carried her up the hill to the platform of the old home. As if in answer to her boy's caresses, she moaned, but made no other sound.

At times some priests came over the hill from the temple in the adjoining valley. One was tall and sin-

ister, with leering eyes and twitching fingers. "The Tiger comes," ran the whisper, and the little group parted as he entered. With his henchmen he walked slowly around the smouldering heap upon the platform. He paused for a moment to peer through the branches of evergreen with which they had covered the father. Then after an interval of indecision, he approached the lamenting child and his mother.

"Take him away!" he snarled. Two henchmen took the little boy by his bare arms and lifted him up.

"Keep him!" came from the protruding, yellow teeth of the priest.

With the staff in his hand he poked the wretched woman to see if any life remained in her. She made no sign. He prodded more ruthlessly, and some of the crowd began to move uneasily. Then suddenly the woman sat up and gazed at the priest with wild-eyed terror.

"The Tiger!" she cried, and made a frantic effort to seize his gown. But her reach fell short, and sinking slowly to the stones again she shuddered a moment, and was gone!

The funeral ceremonies were scant and short. Who had money to rule it otherwise? The neighbours dug a shallow trench in what was said by one to be a spot of good luck, up among the rocks. There was a better place, but The Tiger would not agree to its being so used. It would interfere with some corn-land. Moreover, was he not supplying the coffin boards? Who else could supply them? The three apprentice sons had no money. They borrowed a few cash from their masters to pay for cash-paper, candles and a few brief prayers. What more could they do? Who

then would pay for the coffins? The Tiger? Yes, but he did not give charity for naught. He demanded that little Lew-chee should stand security. How? Why, the boy should be his servant and work off the debt. What was to be the service and for how many years? Those were questions the wily priest did not discuss in detail, and the relatives were too inexperienced to inquire. As for the neighbours, it was not their affair, so why should they interfere, and, moreover, were they not also his tenants?

So the funeral passed with little ceremony. A few surrounding stones and some earth hid the rude slabs. The four sons bowed, and burnt their paper to the souls of their parents. The three eldest went back to their shops and little Lew-chee was led off to the temple to be the prey of The Tiger.

II

THE TIGER

THE Tiger had not always been a thing of terror. When he was a lad of eight, as Lew-chee was now, he had been quite as likeable, and probably much more clever. His father, one of the prominent gentry in an eastern province, sent him to the best of teachers. He had a fine memory and learned rapidly to repeat the Three Character Classic, the Four Hundred Family Names, the Great Learning and by the time he was sixteen had mastered the requisite Four Books and Five Classics, together with many of the orthodox commentaries upon these texts. He would be a degree-man in two years, his teacher declared, for few could write the requisite essays as could this favourite pupil.

But it is fatal, at times, to be a favourite. It proved so for young Chang, for that was his family's name. Out of hours his teacher puffed an opium pipe and young Chang going for special instruction frequently found his master so engaged.

"It eases my lumbago," the old man said, "and makes me forget the monotony of life."

One day young Chang called earlier than usual, and found the teacher out. But the opium outfit, the pipe, the lamp and the putty-like drug were all there. He would prepare it for his master, to surprise him on his return. He took a small piece from the horn box where it was kept, and rolled it carefully upon a wire

till it resembled a pea on the end of a knitting needle. Then he lit the tiny lamp and placed it carefully upon the long, wooden tray. The two-foot tube or pipe with its brass ornamentation lay there. He would blow through it to see that the passage was clear. He placed his lips to the end of the pipe and exhaled and inhaled by turns. It seemed somewhat clogged. The master was delayed. "I will try the pipe and see if it will draw when lighted," he said to himself.

Lying down on his right side, as he had seen the teacher do, he brought the pill, the pipe and the flame into contact, and took a long inhalation. A moment later, the smoke came pouring from his mouth, his nose, his eyes. It choked him and he jumped to his feet coughing. Then a queer feeling of guilt stole over him. He had smoked opium!

"What would my teacher say?" he thought af-frightedly. "What would my father, my mother, my younger brother say, if they were told?"

Hurriedly he extinguished the lamp, wiped off the wire and restored everything to order. Still the teacher lingered. He stole from the room and down a side-street to avoid detection.

Then new thoughts began to travel rapidly through his brain. The fears he had just experienced vanished utterly. He seemed walking on air. The weariness of the day's work was gone. A slight pain he had had in his eyes also disappeared, as though by magic. So this was the pleasure men found in the pipe! No wonder that those who could afford it, used it. He walked on, full of the new exhilaration. His teacher would now assuredly have returned. It was the regular hour. Should he go, then, and have his lesson? He expected to experience a feeling of fear at the thought

of possible detection, but no fear came. He would go back boldly, and if his teacher made any allusion he would express bland surprise. He went. When he entered he found the teacher himself smoking. He had suspected nothing. A half-hour later and the lesson was over. It seemed to him to have been a grand success. To be sure his hand trembled a little when writing, but words, phrases, classical allusions for his essay had come as though by magic. Both teacher and pupil congratulated each other.

That night young Chang slept strangely. Dreams of fairy, airy things swept through his brain. Strange desires seemed to awaken and demand fulfilment. Subtle schemes of attaining fame, fortune, and power which formerly he had discussed with friends apparently opened new avenues. He lay still but wakeful far into the night and then slept heavily. When morning came he found it difficult to rouse himself. His brain seemed to have become a solid, stolid thing. It was noticeable to the family at the morning meal.

"What ails you, my son?" said the father.

"I am not well, and have not rested," the boy replied.

He dallied all day over his books and essay. Then he went to his teacher. The period was an utter anticlimax to the preceding evening. They abandoned their task after a time, chatted, and then parted.

But young Chang had learned something. He had discovered that during the period before his lesson each evening, the teacher went regularly by appointment to aid a wealthy pupil at his own home. That made Chang's downfall easier. He went early the next evening, smoked a pellet, secreted his act as before and aroused no suspicion. He soon took a trifle

more, so that the influences might carry him through at least part of the following day. He remained undetected and recklessly took more and more. After a time, the teacher became aware that his supply of opium was disappearing and accused an old servant. Then one evening, Chang discovered the supply had been locked away. What should he do? He did not dare to force an old box. It might not be there if he did. That evening he absented himself from his lesson and paced the streets wild with craving.

There was nothing else to be done but that he must pawn one of his garments. He sought out a section of the city where he was not known, gave a false name and passed over his silk waistcoat. Then he stole down a side-street and was soon curled up inhaling savagely.

Soon articles began to disappear from the family—ornaments, vases, garments, heirlooms that had been laid away with care. Servants were suspected, but failed to be detected. Then a day came when he, himself, was laid under suspicion and the fact became known to his family. A tragic scene followed. The father was furious.

“What is this disgraceful thing you have brought upon your family?” he shouted.

Young Chang remained sullen and silent. The father severely upbraided him for unfilial conduct, finally beat him severely and imprisoned him in his room. By this time, however, the boy had an even more cruel, dominating master. The opium craving cried for satisfaction—crazed him. With half-insane cunning he broke from his room and made his way to the well-known spot. He pledged his credit and was

accommodated. He could not return, but hid in the inner rooms of the den.

There, in the semi-darkness, he met companions of another kind. They had ways of securing funds of which he soon learned. A young scholar of Chang's ability would be a welcome acquisition. They entertained him, flattered him, entangled him in their meshes. A few days later he forged his father's name to a red-paper promissory note, drew part of the funds and fled, with the gang. They made their way to another city and with Chang's assistance operated successfully.

"I will not mix with these fellows as an equal," he thought to himself one day. "I have a mind superior to theirs."

Slowly Chang became the leader, learned to choose the right man for the peculiar work he had to do and prospered in villainy, stage by stage.

At first he avoided the authorities, planning ways to outwit them and their underlings. Then he learned that it was safer to cooperate. He set himself to purchase the officials with appropriate bribes. When the chief men could not be so secured, he could, at least, secure the camp-followers. He had his own men appointed as lictors, jailors, runners. At times he became a secretary himself in the magistrate's office. Thus he could operate almost with impunity. Thefts were constant and robberies frequent. Rich families had ingenious law-suits framed up against them, and heavy fines imposed. Children, especially girls, were bought and sold into slavery. Relatives of the rich were captured, tortured and held for high ransom. If now and then an action became too flagrant, some innocent decoy was captured red-handed, and Chang

would be among the most prominent in denunciation and the meting out of condign punishment. Few suspected the secret source of all this villainy, and those who did, dared not voice their suspicions.

Thus the years went by, and Chang reached middle-life cruel, crafty, callous to every moral sentiment. His skin became more sallow, his eyes more beady, his long, protruding teeth more yellow and menacing. But, even in China, there comes for such a day of reckoning. Chang's gang had carried out a daring robbery from a rich family. Relatives took the matter up and pushed it energetically. With his usual subtlety, Chang had two dupes seized and was about to have them beheaded. One of the men, however, proved to be the relative of a high-up henchman. The latter, moreover, was susceptible to bribery and told the whole dastardly tale. Chang had just power enough to escape through secret channels and flee from the Province. In far-distant Szechwan, he sought that avenue of escape familiar to many a renegade. He entered the Buddhist priesthood. With shaven head and long, gray, cotton gown, few could detect in the seemingly devout bonzee, the big man among the banditti of a far-off province.

Chang rose rapidly in the ranks of the priesthood. He soon learned to repeat the necessary sutras for funerals and other functions. Accustomed to official life, he knew well how to carry himself under all circumstances. Having mingled with many ranks of humanity, he knew how to adjust himself to the individual idiosyncrasies of his group and soon became popular with the majority. It was evident that he had a natural aptitude for management of men and things,

and in the course of a few years, he was voted to assume control of the many acres which the years had accumulated for the temple brotherhood.

The demon in Chang must have chuckled that day when he was put in control of the temple finances. The funds of which he was possessed at the time of his sudden flight were almost exhausted. Then the opium fiend within him had to be satisfied, and he had need to exercise much subtlety in order to meet the craving. A number of the monks used the drug by stealth, but the abbot, a thoughtful man, frowned upon it. But Chang's habit had a strangle-hold on him—hard and inexorable. But now he had a room of his own, was largely his own master, and had henchmen, as of old, to work his will.

Time and again, Chang's subtlety showed to the brotherhood that they had made an apparently worthy choice. Funds were never in arrear, food was better, at least sufficiently improved to win approbation.

"Our Treasurer is a very skilled man," one of the brotherhood remarked.

"Chang has a great mind and knows more than any of us," said another in reply.

With the wretched tenants in their cornstalk shacks, it was otherwise. They soon discovered that any former kindness or laxity they had enjoyed was gone. At times something approximating liberality was shown when an unfortunate through illness or some other reverse desired a loan. Then Chang would lend a ready ear, and write out terms which the unlettered mountaineer could not read and which he revealed only on the day of fulfilment. Slowly, yet surely, a hundred humble homes came under his grip. Fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, fawned upon him,

feared him, loathed him. Some one whispered a name one day, which ran as if by telepathy from thought to thought, from lip to lip. Henceforth he was known as "The Tiger."

It was to serve such a fiend as this that the sequence of circumstances brought little Lew-chee. He was led to the temple by The Tiger's henchmen and housed in a dark corner of his room. He was to be The Tiger's special property and slave. His discipline began almost immediately. Someone came to The Tiger's door, which was always kept shut, knocked and shouted, asking if the owner were within?

"He's at home. Come in," called out the boy with the frankness of childhood. That night he slept naked upon the cold earth floor, with his hands and feet tied together, and a stone in his mouth. He learned quickly that he was to see nothing, hear nothing, do nothing, say nothing, except as The Tiger told him. Then he was to obey to the letter on peril of cruel torture.

One thing, however, The Tiger did for his good. He set him to work to read the books. This was in part camouflage, a pretence of showing how well disposed he felt toward the child and, in part, foresight.

"I shall need one who can read and write to be fully my instrument," thought the cunning priest.

Thus to the eyes of the dwellers in the temple, and even to some of his old neighbours in the valleys, little Lew, "Number Seven," had met good luck though some of the latter wondered and doubted. For the boy, himself, there were many occupations. By stealth he wound down the long, dark valley at night to secure supplies of opium for his master. He scoured the

pipe, lamp and pans, and waited upon him far into the silent mornings as he smoked. He hid in secret places to overhear what the other monks were saying, or among the corn and brush to hearken to the conversations of unsuspecting tenants, all of which he had to report accurately to his tyrant. He was absent at times for days at a time carrying mysterious letters up into the mountains, waiting in hovels for answers, and returning by secret routes, so that no one might intercept him or his message. He led strange, vile-looking men from some trysting spot to his master's quarters and stood outside the door to give warning of any attempted interference. He had his suspicions, but his lips were sealed. He even played bland ignorance before The Tiger when he could see that the latter feared he might have heard and absorbed too much. He even learned to know nothing, save what his torturer would have him know.

So the years passed. He grew outwardly bigger, inwardly bolder. He served, studied, dissembled, and secretly waited! There was an old dog he sometimes patted as he passed a stone platform among the cornfields. There was a big grave, now overgrown with ferns and brushwood up among the crags, where at times he knelt. There was a lost sister, suffering he knew not where, in this cruel world. There was a mother's last haunting cry, "The Tiger!" He waited!

Lew-chee now understood many things. The Tiger's avarice had increased with the years. So had his temerity. At first he had been content with the small margins which he squeezed from the wretched tenants. Some of these, however, foresaw the snare of loans and were punctual to a day with their payments. Among these had been Lew-chee's parents. The

Tiger then tried petty persecutions but found himself balked by settled customs and the shrewd sense of his tenants. Finally they had engaged their pretty daughter without Chang's sanction, at which he became furious. How dare a mountain lout thwart his designs? The powers of his old life came pouring in upon him. In a few weeks he was in touch with a small band of blacklegs in the neighbourhood. He became their brain. A big bully known locally as The Feathered Hen became their nominal leader. Atrocities of theft, robbery, arson, blackmail, abduction and murder began to terrorize the countryside. Lew-chee's home had been among the first to suffer.

The Tiger became more and more rapacious. He conceived the idea of amassing great wealth and power. The breakup of China which followed the revolution aided his designs. He secured arms for his band—the best modern guns. He recruited from renegade soldiers. He encouraged his men to join up as regular troops and then, after learning military manoeuvres, to desert with all their equipment. He captured a small town up in the mountains and made it his headquarters. Suddenly The Feathered Hen and his men would appear, surround some unfortunate village on market-day, loot the place, slay such of the men as attempted to defend their homes, and carry off scores of men, women and children of the well-to-do to hold for ransom—"Fat Pigs" he termed them in derision.

During all this Lew-chee was The Tiger's messenger. Screened by the quiet temple, the vile priest became more contemptuous of detection. His share of the spoils grew apace. Through his henchmen, he bought lands everywhere, and hid the deeds and other papers in the hollow interior of an old, iron idol in

his room. That was sure protection against both fire and detection. Who would think of searching there? But he had forgotten his apt pupil. Lew-chee, under pretense of knowing nothing, knew all. He had been taught to act as a skilful eavesdropper to priests and tenants. He played the same part to his tormentor and his gang. He was sent with despatches. He delivered copies and saved the originals. He had been taught to grovel before the image of the iron god of war in The Tiger's rooms. He learned to grope into the god's heart and find there the hidden documents. He feared the god, but he feared more a long-gone cry, which called ever in his ears—"The Tiger!"

"I will bide my time," he would say to himself, "and one day I will settle with this old fiend."

Then the crisis came. Emboldened by success, the band attacked a big county town. They were surprised from an unexpected quarter and several of the band captured. Among the captives was the son of The Feathered Hen. The latter sent an ultimatum to The Tiger.

"My son must be saved or I will come personally and settle with you," ran the message.

"Something must be done, someone sacrificed, and that speedily," muttered The Tiger.

The priest acted promptly. The executions would take place on the morrow. So he sent Lew-chee with a letter to one of the jail-guards who was his henchman, to say that the bearer was to be drugged, his clothing changed with the bandit's son, and the latter set free. Lew-chee might plead and protest on the way to execution, but what prisoner did not do that? Who would pause to pay heed to a robber?

The letter was delivered, but not to the guard. It

went straight to the magistrate. Lew-chee had learned how to open correspondence. And this letter told him that the time to act had come. When summoned before the official he had his facts well prepared.

"Where is your evidence?" asked the magistrate.

"Here," said Lew-chee, producing a whole sheaf of original letters proving the truth of his statements. That night, led by the boy, a band of militia suddenly burst into The Tiger's den. The iron god of war delivered up its secrets. Trapped at last, the cunning died from The Tiger's cruel eyes. He gnashed, grovelled, gobbled.

"Aha!" laughed Lew-chee, "I have you at last."

Next morning at dawn the lad stood by as the firing squad performed its sinister task. He thought he heard a snarl, as the shots rang out. Then again a voice came—or was it an echo from the city wall?—"The Tiger—slain!" A wild, weird feeling—was it of vengeance or freedom?—flooded Lew-chee's frame.

III

THE HUNCHBACK

ANOTHER chapter had closed in Lew-chee's life and a new one was about to begin. His brothers urged him to learn a trade. They were now a dyer, a carpenter, a tailor, respectively. Those were surely well-tried roads to a regular rice bowl, what more could be desired? But the temple authorities intervened. It was not an easy matter to get promising boys for the priesthood. Moreover, Lew-chee had, in a manner, already entered it and he was immediately wanted to aid in ending the entanglements so tediously complicated by The Tiger. No one else knew, even remotely, how matters stood. So the boy remained.

But he disliked The Tiger's rooms and all their associations. He especially feared and hated the great iron figure of Kwan-yu, the god of war, as it stood there, hard, sinister, threatening. He had often heard Kwan-yu's story from his master and from the men in the bandit camps.

It ran back nearly twenty centuries to the declining days of the great Han dynasty, when Lew-chee's own ancestor, the far-famed Lew-bee, fought long and fiercely for a tottering throne. The eunuchs had usurped the power of the effeminate king and rebellion was rife in all quarters. Chang-fay and Lew-bee were seeking recruits for the royal forces, and had temporarily set up their standard in a wine shop:

*"While thus engrossed, a huge-limbed barrowman
In haste his load sets down, and calls, Bring wine
Without delay; I'm off to town to 'list!
Lew-bee with pleasure notes the giant's form;—
A face like two brown dates, and lips like rouge,
Red phoenix eyes, with sleeping silkworm brows,
Broad countenance, and aspect terrible:—
Invites him to a seat and asks his name.
'Kwan-yu's my name, in Goodope my home,
But having slain the village bully, I
For five years past have wandered far away,
Till hearing of the enlistment, I have come
To join the forces and assist the King!'"*

Such was Kwan-yu's introduction to his comrades. Soon the three formed a blood-brotherhood famous throughout history as the Peach Garden Pact. In life they attained great glory. Since death they have been even more highly exalted. All have temples to their honour, the former barrowman now being worshipped as god of war.

Others might admire the huge hero with "aspect terrible," but in Lew-chee its form aroused only emotions of hatred. He could see in him only the spirit of The Feathered Hen and The Tiger. He asked to be given some other form of service in the temple and after the finances had been properly adjusted, his request was granted. He was appointed to assist a little priest known locally as The Hunchback.

The Hunchback's history was a simple one.

"My father was a chair-carrier," he told Lew-chee. "My mother aided the family finances by washing clothes daily at the river's edge. With a baby strapped to her back she knelt upon the stones sousing and scrubbing from morning till night. One day some

clothes became caught in the current. In her endeavour to rescue these, my mother's bound feet slipped on the slimy stones and she fell headlong. She did not suffer much herself but the baby who had broken her fall cried piteously, and for days his life hung in the balance.

"The accident passed, and the baby lived. Later, he grew up slowly, sickly, and could not stand straight. By the time he was seven, it was seen that he was to be a perpetual cripple. The father had gone on a distant journey carrying an official and had not returned. How could a poor widow continue to support such a son? She took him to a nearby temple and disposed of him to the priests. Since then he has passed from place to place and for many years now he has been a settled member of this mountain temple community. That crippled boy was myself."

The Hunchback could not work in the fields nor cut wood. He could not march in procession through the streets nor be a participant in the long-drawn-out ceremonies connected with the burial of the dead. He could not well go through the long sessions of alternate risings, prostrations, mumblings and meditations connected with formal worship, nor yet stand about ringing bells and beating drums to call the attention of the idols as pilgrims bowed their "three-times-three" and presented their petitions. So to him fell the duties of keeping the oil supplied that lights might never die out before the faces of the images, of collecting the half-consumed candles of worshippers, and of rising at first touch of dawn to beat the big temple drums and ring the bells that sent their echoes far and wide over the valleys.

But The Hunchback was getting old. He needed

aid, and Lew-chee was appointed to be his assistant. At first the youth greatly enjoyed the change. He found The Hunchback a complete contrast to his old master. The little old man was slow, silent, and sweetly gentle. He believed the traditional tales regarding the great images wholly, and served them loyally and lovingly. This same spirit he sought to instill into his youthful disciple.

The temple ran up the mountainside, court on court, much like the squares of a ladder. The Hunchback had heard, somewhere, that the great world was thus constructed, ascending from vast plains on all sides up through successive heavens on some precipitous Sumeru peak to the highest crest, where the Buddha sat peacefully radiant in perpetual peace and power. He tried to tell this to little Lew-chee, but to the boy it was all vague and mysterious. He succeeded better when he spoke of the temple guards. Down in the lowest court sat two riding upon lions. Lew-chee learned that one was "Hen," so named because he hissed through his teeth, and the other was "Hah," for he shouted with open mouth, a sudden warning against any intruders to the sacred spot.

"They are both generals of the Veda Kings, Lew-chee," said The Hunchback. "Can you not see their armour, their helmets, their swords full drawn?"

"I see nothing," replied Lew-chee.

"Well, you will some day," returned The Hunchback. "The young see not such things very clearly."

In the court above stood their masters, the kings themselves. Their faces white, red, green, blue, told that they came from four continents—north, south, east, west of the slopes of the central and sacred peaks. As rulers they had mysterious methods. One governed

with brandished sword, but, of the others, one ruled by the ringing of a bell by which he summoned the winds, another with a great guitar forced out fire as his scourge, while the third with squirming snake in hand set forth poisons and pestilence. The Hunchback humbled himself still lower if that were possible in their august presence, and poured an extra allowance of oil into their lamps. But Lew-chee, if he did not hate them, at least held himself aloof. They spoke to him too much of terror and torture, of The Feathered Hen and The Tiger. He did his duty, but kept his distance.

He liked but little better the god of Wealth in another court, and that despite his golden robes. Masses of the people worshipped him assiduously, especially the merchants, but Lew-chee felt a loathing towards him. Here, too, he seemed to see too plainly the talons of The Tiger.

The old Hunchback loved, too, to pause before the great Buddha as he sat serene in his highest court, the "Court of the Hero" as it was called. The half-closed eyes and unfurrowed brow seemed to bequeath a benediction, an inward satisfaction, and an outward peace and stillness. At other times he spent long hours before the Ruler of the Western Heavens. A far-away look came into his eyes as he gazed upon the image, and touched the outstretched hand, bowing tenderly in reverence the while.

But the boy had no thoughts of death and the hereafter. He appreciated much more fully the motives of the many, as they burned their incense before the black and forbidding form of the Dragon King. Did he not control the rains, and were not these necessary for the farmers in all the valleys, and far out among

the rice fields of the vast plains? At other times he paused before the Eighteen Saints and wished, boy-like, that he might obtain the mysterious powers by which they were able to tame serpents, ride wild beasts, walk upon the waves and float upon the winds.

"Why do not you, and all our brothers obtain such powers?" he asked The Hunchback one day.

"Alas! my son!" replied the old man, "that requires great mental discipline. None seem willing or worthy in our day!"

His master seemed much more confident regarding the powers of the goddess of Mercy. She could appear in a thousand forms. Was she not pictured with an hundred arms? She could save men from famine, from flood, from all perils of fire, of robbers, of cannibals, of devils. There seemed nothing she would not, or could not do.

Yet Dee-dsang, the Deliverer-from-Death, held, for the boy, the strongest appeal. She, so his master affirmed, had power even to save men from the tortures of the land of shades. Her mother had, through life, been disobedient to the law of Buddha. This greatly grieved the daughter and she went often to the shrine of an ancient Buddha to pray. One day she fell into a trance and was transported to the bitter sea. There she saw thousands of unfortunates, struggling amid the waves and being constantly bitten by huge birds with iron beaks which bore down upon them. She inquired earnestly for her mother. No, she was not there. She was in the grip of a much more cruel fate. Her punishment was to dwell forever in the dungeons of eternal torture and darkness.

"But," added her guide, in these scenes of misery, "your prayers have been answered, and even now

your mother is free. No one beseeches the Buddha in vain."

Then the maiden took a vow that she would devote her existence, for a myriad kalpas, in freeing other deluded ones from that eternal death. The Buddha rejoiced at her resolve and appointed her to the desired post of Deliverer-from-Death.

The thought touched Lew-chee, and greatly troubled him. What had been the fate of his parents? He had heard them not once, but many times, complain of the oppression of the priesthood. True, it was chiefly against The Tiger and his torments, but he had been a priest and as such had he not represented the Buddha? It seemed a bitter thought that such an one as The Tiger could curse his parents for the next life as well as for this. Still that was just the sort of treachery that satiated The Tiger. Lew-chee determined to thwart him of his prey. He, therefore, prostrated himself before the idol, morning and night, for weeks. He prayed long and earnestly for the deliverance of his unsuspecting parents. He told of the treachery of The Tiger. He repeated the name of Dee-dsang, over and over again, ten thousand times. He kept her oil-lamps and candles burning with unusual brightness. For months he scarcely ate or slept. Pitying him, the kindly Hunchback endeavoured to console him.

"Your prayers must, long ago, have been fully answered, Lew-chee."

"Are you sure of that?" asked the boy.

"Quite sure," answered the old man. But Lew-chee was not thoroughly assured, for even the later years found him bowing, treading softly, whenever he came into the god's presence.

Most of all in those days, however, when such celestial companions must be chosen, he loved to frequent a small, detached court to the east of the main temple. It was the home of Mee-lay, "The Laughing Buddha." There apparently in perpetual good humor the big, beaming body sat, clad in smiles, sunshine and the chubby arms of clinging childhood, nothing else being seemingly needed above the waist line. While other gods might glare with gruesome mien or send forth sad commiseration upon a world of suffering, his great rotund, rollicking figure seemed ever to say there was another side to life and his orbs to send forth a welcoming twinkle. Moreover, memories of his own childhood and a long-gone mother lingered there and by times a tear of sympathy shone in the big, beneficent eyes—or was it in the boy's own?—as he came nearer, and after bowing reverently, laid his small hand in the great, giant palm.

Later, as the years passed, his affections gradually turned to the god of Literature. He was growing into his teens now and his wonder as to the meaning of the world grew apace. The Tiger's training had developed at least one talent in him; he had been taught to read and write those strange ideographs,—the Chinese characters. At first he read only the books of the Buddhist ritual. They told him endless tales of Buddhas, Enlightened Ones, Bodhisattvas, Semi-enlightened Saints, Arhans, Saints, Devas, Celestial Giants, Narakas, Serpents, and many other strange beings possessed of marvellous powers. He read, too, of numberless continents and iron mountain-ranges, of bitter seas and earth-prisons, of worlds endless in space and eons of kalpas of time, till his head swam with the thought of the whirling mysteries. Up in the library in the loft of one of the

courts he knew many books were stored. There he found huge tomes, running into tens, scores, hundreds of volumes of treatises on his temple's faith. Some of these compilations and commentaries he tried many a time to read, but made little progress. Some of these he would bring to those of the priests who could also read, but they, too, were puzzled.

"What mean these things?" he would ask.

But the answer was ever the same, "My son, we know not."

The doctrines were too subtly psychological, too abstrusely philosophic. So he would shut the musty, worm-eaten volumes away in their dark cupboards determined to seek for wisdom elsewhere.

Far down the hill in a little dilapidated temple the tenants conducted a small school. The old teacher was lame and almost blind, but he could repeat most of the Confucian classics by heart, and as he lived on approximately a bushel of rice per month, he was continued from year to year. He lived in an adjoining room, where he cooked his own food and retired for quiet occasional smokes and snoozes. The rest of his days, with no stops for Saturdays or Sundays, and but for few holidays, he heard lessons from morning dawn to evening dusk. His eyes were sufficiently useful to note at short range any omitted strokes in the large copy characters, and his ears sufficiently accurate to detect an error in tone or a lessening in volume on the part of any pupil. So the specially fortunate of the sons of the mountaineers sat round their rough tables and shouted toward heaven the sayings of the sages till the teacher called them by turns to his desk. There, the book was laid down, and turning his back to his master, the pupil rattled off philo-

sophical and political sayings as a young Occidental might do his multiplication table. Few of his pupils ever came to the place where they were expected to grasp the meaning of all this ancient lore. But that was not the fault of their teacher. The trouble lay rather in the cruel fate which sent them off to carry loads of firewood down the hills, crawl through dark tunnels in search of coal, or take their part in planting and hoeing the corn which, in the summer, waved through the valleys.

One evening the old teacher had a caller—Lew-chee. It was not the first time the two had met. Few in the valley but bowed to their "old scholar," and since the days of The Tiger's destruction Lew-chee was equally well known. But this meeting was not for the usual casual conversation which with long, lighted pipes for solace, the mountaineers so loved. Lew-chee came with the gift of a few cash he had saved from the pilgrims' tips. These, he presented, well wrapped in red paper and, with becoming bow, begged for instruction.

"Teacher," he said humbly, "I come to you to learn something of the wonderful things of which you are master."

It was a meeting mutually agreeable. The boy had reached a stage when he was keen for knowledge, and the old teacher was equally athirst for some one to whom he might tell forth the thoughts of the great teachers that teemed within his brain.

"I will teach you, Lew-chee," said the old man, "if you are willing to learn."

It was not Lew-chee's first introduction to the far-famed Confucian classics. In learning to read and write, these had been his text-books. But he knew lit-

tle of their meaning. Now, under the guidance of his sympathetic superior, he plunged eagerly into this ancient lore. The Hunchback, too, was sympathetic, though, at first, somewhat sceptical of the new adventure. So the boy, his lamps duly lighted, soon found himself striding nightly down the hill, to drink more deeply at his new-found fountain.

In the Great Learning, one of the "Four Books" of his country, he pondered long such sentences as this:

"The ancients who wished to make manifest illustrious virtue throughout the Empire, first ordered well their States. Wishing to order well their States, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things!"

Thus did great ideals speak to Lew-chee down the centuries. Illustrious virtue everywhere! Well-ordered states and families! Cultivated persons! Sincere thoughts, utmost knowledge, investigation of things! Who sought such ends in his day? The Tiger? The Feathered Hen and his gang? The official and his soldiers? No. These sought only wealth and wine and wassail. The priests and peasants? Poor people, they sought only filling from the rice-bowl and rags of wretched clothing. The little Hunchback? Yes, he was kind, but he sought none of these great ideals. He thought only on some mysterious existence somewhere, sometime in a far-off Western

Heaven. But the ancients had had such hopes. Why did not some one dream them and dare them now?

Thus he questioned himself and his new teacher. The latter told him of the achievements of the great Master in governing his native state of Lu.

"A transforming government went abroad," the old man told him. "Dishonesty and dissoluteness hid their heads. Loyalty and good faith became the characteristics of the men, and chastity and docility those of the women. He was the idol of the people and flew, in songs through their mouths."

Lew-chee listened reverently and dived eagerly into the pages of the Analects that he might know more of his country's sage.

While thus daily drinking deeply at the source of the spirit of China's long centuries, an event occurred which was once more to divert the stream of his life. It was in the autumn, when the corn was ripening and almost ready for the harvest. As usual, the farmers, fearing the descent of wild hogs from the far western ranges, had organized their guards, and nightly the firing of great fire-crackers and the shouting of men and boys resounded through the valley. This year the herds were decidedly more ravenous than usual. Moreover, the country had been so ravaged by robbers throughout many of the valleys that the people had abandoned their homes and the fields had gone untilled. In the temple-valley things had not fared so badly, and the wild herds of swine soon discovered the fact. Driven to desperation by hunger they rushed down the mountain sides, and despite the baying of dogs, the shouts of men and the actual shooting by Lew-chee and others, of several of their number, they made nightly raids in increasing force.

Usually the farmers themselves were quite sufficient to ward off such attacks, but now the priests also were called on to render aid. Indeed there was no refusing, for should the corn crop perish, the temple could expect nothing from their plundered tenants. Lew-chee had joined in heartily. For him it was hilarious sport to rush hither and thither led on by the baying of a dog or the "halloo" of a comrade for help. The rank and file of the priesthood might have scruples about the taking of life, but so far he had taken no vows. So he shot his gun well, or plunged desperately and effectively with an old spear. Thus he shared joyously in the hunt and even managed to be present at some friendly farmer's home when the savoury soup and pork, the proceeds from the preceding night's foray, were being eaten by the fortunate.

One night, as he rushed forward in pursuit of a big boar dimly outlined in the semi-darkness, he was brought suddenly to a pause. A little, huddled figure lay across his path. The boar had knocked it aside in its mad retreat. Lew-chee stooped to see who of his comrades had been so unfortunate. He drew back aghast. It was the little Hunchback.

"Oh, my master, my master!" he cried.

Others were with him in a moment, but he did not need their aid. Tenderly he picked the poor, light body up and bore it to its room in the temple. Older monks came, and they laid the old man gently on his hard, straw matting. He was not dead, for the heart was still beating, but his breath seemed to have departed from him. They called him. He opened his eyes gently, and as his glances passed from face to face in the dim candlelight they smiled upon the boy. The abbot came and sent some for wine and some for

medicine from the great cupboard, and others to repeat the litany before the goddess of mercy. The boy remained by his master as it was meet that he should.

The thin, old lips seemed to move. Lew-chee bent close to listen. His ear caught a feeble sound.

"Amita Buddha, Amita Buddha," came faintly from the frail lips.

A moment later and the gentle spirit of the little Hunchback had fared forth—whither? Lew-chee doubted not but that it sped speedily to some quiet spot amid the shady groves of the long longed-for Western Paradise, the Peace Land of Amita, the Buddha of Boundless Age.

"My gentle master," he said with bowed head, "be at peace."

In the Tibetan land, to the west, they dispose of their dead in three ways. Some are thrown into the river to be borne away in the rushing rapids. Others are cut asunder and fed to carrion birds upon the mountainsides. Still others are set upon funeral pyres and burned. In China, public feeling has been strongly against such practices. Ancestor-worship has created such respect for the dead body that the majority of the Buddhist priesthood are buried in the ordinary way with coffin and grave. Still, burial by burning is widely practised. It is thought to be more effective in purging away evil spirits.

As the little dead priest had been deformed from childhood, and especially since he had met with a species of violent death, it was decided that his body should be burned. Behind the temple, in a bit of apparently primeval forest, stood a small, square tower. It had but one door and was roofed by slabs of rough

stone. This was the scene for such rites. The preparation was simple. Lew-chee and others gathered a large mass of dried branches and straw with which they half-filled the place. The sadly deformed, little figure, wrapped around in his priestly robes, was seated securely upon the summit of the pile. Written accounts of his life and deeds, together with much cash-paper for his use during, and after his journey, and his credentials as a member of the priesthood, were carefully placed around him. Then the big slab door was set in place and securely fixed.

That evening the priests in solemn procession came forth. They were dressed in full regalia of yellow and gray, and headed by the abbot. Many times they encircled the sacred pyre chanting, marching, counter-marching, repeating long passages of transliterated litany. Then they stood suddenly still with bowed heads. The abbot approached and uttering a special charge, gave orders to a lay brother who touched a torch to the fuel, appearing below the door. In a few minutes all was ablaze, and the priests in solemn procession wended their way back to the temple. A week later a small stone urn, bore within it the ashes, and without the priestly name of another kindly but sorely benighted soul of the Buddhist brotherhood. Lew-chee mourned his master with deep affection, and kept the incense burning regularly before his resting place.

IV

THE ABBOT

ONCE again there came a change in Lew-chee's life. He was now in the full vigour of young manhood. Noting this, the abbot decided that he should prepare for the priesthood. In the poignancy of his grief for his departed friend, Lew-chee readily assented. "I am willing to do as you desire," he said.

Accordingly he gave over his duties in attending the oil and lights of the idols to others and went daily to join the number of those who sat upon palm-mats and chanted sutras. It was monotonous work. They were up early and, with intervals for meals, droned away most of the day. The leader, assisted by others with small cymbals and a big, hollow block called the "wooden fish," beat out the cadence. Nor did the contents create interest and enthusiasm as had the Confucian Classics. No one explained them. They were supposed rather to have efficacy through many repetitions and scrupulous care that there should be no omissions. More than once Lew-chee tried to understand their meaning. But few of the priests had ever made such an attempt, and when he tried himself, he found them full of strange beings and groups of words with no apparent meaning, merely transliterations of sounds from ancient Sanskrit. Since his days with the lame teacher he had more and more felt growing within him a desire to see in his land a return of the glorious days of the ancients.

"What has all this to do with such a transformation?" he would ask himself. "What can it do to help to bring back the golden age?"

Once a day there came a change, as he entered the hall for meditation. He had often watched his seniors as they sat there, eyes fixed on the end of their nose, and their noses bent toward the center of their bodies. He had been told that thus men got rid of the delusions of sense and desire, and that thus the holy men of old gradually attained Nirvana. Now he was to try it for himself. He did so with full abandon day after day. Yet, doing his best he could not divest himself of his senses and desires. His ears would hear, his nose smell the strange odours, his limbs ache and his eyes pop open. As for desires, they seemed to come all the more, so that he could not follow any one in particular. Such a noble path much praised by the Great Buddha, might be good for the world-weary and the aged like many of the older monks around him, but for a youth full of red blood and hot enthusiasm, it was a species of slow torture.

Funerals, at times, gave him some respite. Then, usually for three nights in succession, if he were so fortunate as to be counted among the chosen group (a number that varied according to the purse of the mourners) he had some small degree of activity and freedom, and not least important, better food. One night with varied ceremonies, much chanting, music and many marchings to and fro, they welcomed back the soul of the departed and, using a paper tablet as proxy, gave him a spirit bath. The next night they dramatised the tradition of a youth who went to Hades and delivered his mother from the iron city though

guarded by many demons. He much enjoyed the breaking-in of the iron gates, symbolised by the smashing of some old earthenware pots and tile in a corner, done by a priest with a wooden truncheon. But, best of all, was the last night when he, being youngest, was usually seated aloft on a throne made of two-decked tables. Clad in royal robes, he made mystic movements with his fingers to expel demons, ending all about midnight, or later, by rolling bits of boiled rice into balls and shooting them about the crowd. As these were designated as "devil eggs" and declared to have the power of preventing sickness to the fortunate who secured and swallowed them, the crowd was always dense and competition keen. It was the nearest approach to a satisfying sport that Lew-chee found in those tedious days.

But every week made him more weary. He tried hard to do his part, for the abbot had been specially kind to him.

"My son," he said one day, "you have more than ordinary ability. If you apply yourself diligently to the mastery of the books and ceremonies you may, yourself, some day be abbot."

This gave Lew-chee temporary ambition, but it waned as he went time and again to the great cupboards in the loft that held the library and thumbed over the seemingly endless sutras, shastras and historical records.

"When I have mastered all these," he said, gloomily, "what will it do to bring peace and prosperity to my people?"

One day he went with this query to the now ageing abbot. The old man shook his head sadly. The young man's questionings sent his thoughts back to

his own youth and his own ambitions. He, too, had gone through the schools and had read and been roused by the sayings of the Sage. He had passed the gradual examinations and even been among the chosen few who had gone to Peking and been presented to the Emperor as a member of the Academy. Returning to his native province, he had gone forth in high spirits to enter the government service. Then he soon found that his classic lore was no longer wanted, save to turn a fine phrase at a feast or write a proclamation. He was expected only to keep the masses quiet and through taxes, bribes, gifts and squeeze, send on satisfactory sums to the officials higher up and his august ruler, the Son of Heaven. He found, too, that the higher he climbed the official grades, the keener was the competition and the larger must be the gifts to gain preferment.

Still he had struggled on and his years passed from twenty-five to fifty. Honour had come to him, and power and wealth. Then fortune had turned. His group of official aspirants had failed. Their rivals had offered bigger bribes with great viceroys and others, and had succeeded. He was accused to the Emperor of extortion and disobedience. He suddenly found himself dishonoured among men, degraded, robbed of power and his property, first sequestered and then seized.

To this was added another grave disappointment. He had no sons. One had lived a few months and had died. The later years brought only disappointment. Girls had come to the home, but they could not fill the longing he felt for a son. They would some day wed into other families and be lost. A son was needed to keep alive the family name and stock, and

especially to provide support through suitable sacrifices and offerings, for ancestors in the land of shades. How could he depart himself, how could he face his forefathers, with such a forecast? All must be beggars, orphan spirits in the shadow land! It was unbearably bitter to contemplate!

A few months were spent wretchedly in trying to retrieve his fortunes and then he had sought the seclusion of the monastery. Why not? He had read somewhat of the psychological and philosophical side of Buddhism. His own experience tallied well with its teaching. Was not life full of desire only to end in deception and delusion? To find rest, one must assuredly start anew, by denying all sorts of sense and longing. Satisfaction could only be found in that stillness of soul which is Nirvana. Moreover, in the monastery the ever-renewed generations of the priesthood would serve as posterity. He did not hesitate long. Present, past and future all pressed him forward. He placed the small sum he had saved from the wreck of his fortunes at the disposal of the brotherhood, had his long hair shorn, donned the grey garb and took the vows. Since then he had been at peace. The Buddha had assuredly shown the way of escape from this strife-weary world!

All this, with many amplifications, he told to Lew-chee, not once but on many occasions. He even confided to the youth that in him he hoped to find a spiritual son who would show many the way of salvation.

Lew-chee listened, meditated and questioned. To him the world seemed, at times, as he left the dingy courts of the temple, to be full of rare sights and sounds and smells. The great trees spake through their rugged size. The leaves and birds sang songs of

joy. The flowers and forest instilled life through his distended nostrils. The mountain streams as he watched their mad gallop gripped him and grappled his soul to be up and doing, going somewhere, somehow. He spoke of this to the abbot.

The old man nodded sagely. "Yes," he answered, "so was it in my youth. That is the way of the world. It allures but to annihilate!"

"But Confucius and the great men of old have not so spoken,—did not so find it," argued Lew-chee. "They believed that the Emperor and his statesmen by proper cultivation and example could bring peace and prosperity to all under heaven."

"Aye," answered the abbot, "I have tried it. Others have tried it. Our land for two thousand years has tried it, and what is it today? Everywhere, disorder, deception, strife, slaughter, and shame, stalk through the land."

"But what would become of our country if all did as the monks have done, sire?" queried the youth. "What would we do for food, clothing, homes? Should all the farmers and the shepherds and the workers come to the monasteries and sit day by day in meditation? What would become of knowledge if all the youth but repeated prayers and sutras as we do? What would become of the remnant of order in the land if all officials retired as you have done, sire, and left the land to the riff-raff and the robbers?"

The aged man only sighed and soliloquized. "Twere better all should perish, than that strife persist!" he said.

Then after a brief silence, he went on: "Perhaps the Buddha-that-is-to-be may show a better way!"

The youth was all attention. Was there then to be

another Buddha? he inquired. And what would his way be? What was his solution for the struggles of the nation? He listened earnestly as the abbot repeated the tradition.

"Gautama, the Lion of the Sakya land in India, was not the only Enlightened One," said the old man more slowly. "There were others before him who brought knowledge to the world. There will be others after him. Before him were the Lamp-Lighter and many others. After him will come Maitreya, the Merciful. Tradition says he is now in one of the Heavens, that there he was visited and foretold his future by Gautama. He will come three thousand years after the last Buddha, making his advent upon earth on the first day of the New Year.

"You have often seen his image in the temple. Yes, he is the one with the big, rounded body and jolly face, with the little ones clambering about his shoulders. Some call him the Laughing Buddha. But all these images, to the initiated, my son, are but the allegories of the artists. All this imagery is but for the sake of the ignorant and uninitiated. The real temple is the human heart. The deities are but the great desires that long for satisfaction. The sculptors have done their best, but who knows what manner of being the future Buddha will be? It is said that the last one was sixteen feet high and that the Merciful will be sixty. But what is that, save a way of saying that he will greatly surpass the past in all excellence? Would that we might see his day, my son! But alas, both you and I will have passed over, a thousand years before his advent."

There was a long pause. Speaking more in soliloquy than in conversation, the abbot rocked gently to and

fro and a far-away look came into his fading eyes. Again he spoke:

"I have known but three ways of life," he said. "There is the way of the Taoist. That follows inaction, and, today, has degenerated into a driving forth of imaginary devils. There is the way of the Sage. That seemed good to me in my youth and I followed it. It seeks to redeem the world by the example and influence of the cultivated few. It has failed. There is the way of the Enlightened One. It shows a way out of this world-weariness. My experience has shown it is best."

Again a pause, and the abbot's head bowed. "And yet,—and yet,—I do not fully get light," he half-whispered. "May the Merciful One bring it in fulness!"

The abbot's head fell upon his bosom; the young man slipped silently away. The old man sat far into the night meditating upon the past; the young man strode forth into the forest to settle his soul for the long and calling future, and dream of a great dawn,—the days of the Laughing Buddha, the Buddha-yet-to-be!

One day as Lew-chee was passing through the temple he saw several soldiers entering the rooms he knew so well as the haunt of The Tiger. He had rarely been in the place since the old days of sad memory. He followed, now, to see a young officer and his men assiduously burning paper and bowing to the old god of war, Kwan-yu. The grim, old, iron image stood there unchanged by the years, his contorted countenance speaking only of the savagery of battle.

Lew-chee chatted with the soldiers for a time.

From them he learned that the internecine warfare which had dragged on from year to year in the province ever since the commencement of the Republic, had now broken out more fiercely than before. Their band was being summoned from the small city on the plains to join the march eastward, and they had come to secure the aid of the veteran god. The youth followed them for a time as they departed that he might hear more, for news came rarely to the mountain-top, watched them down the long, winding hill, then sauntered back to the temple in the twilight. Ah, that he, too, might go somewhere and join in the struggles of the great world!

Unwittingly he found himself again at the entrance of the old room. A last ray of the western sun, peeping through a gap in the hills fell full on the grim face of the old warrior-god. Lew-chee was surprised to find himself no longer entertaining toward him a feeling of fear, but rather held by a sort of fascination. He recalled again the traditions of the Three Kingdoms and the three redoubtable warriors, Chang-fay, Lew-bee, and Kwan-yu. They had fought to preserve the land against usurpation. The soldiers had told him that the land was again being usurped by robbers and raiders from another province. They were going forth to fight for freedom. And he? He was spending his days repeating endless prayers and sutras. To what purpose? Had not the abbot admitted that the images were, in the main, but allegories of past artists? Was not Kwan-yu but a man, a real hero in his day, but a man, not a god? Was not the image but an illustration in iron of his spirit? Was not that what was needed in the world, the culture of Confucius, the courage of Kwan-yu? Would not these

usher in the age of the Buddha-yet-to-be, the Laughing Buddha?

Thus meditating he slowly approached the image. He ran his hand steadily down the uplifted, great, right arm. Would that he might have the strength to thus go forth and fight for freedom. He felt a new friendship for the once dread figure.

Then he thought of the hollow recess within the frame, which had served so long as The Tiger's secret depository. He ran his arm around to the back. The spot was full of cobwebs and the dust of the years. He put his hand into the opening and felt about. It was empty. No; there were a few bits of paper wedged into one niche. He grasped them and removed them carefully. What were they that had escaped the searching soldiers? It was now dim within the walls of the room, so he carried the frail pages to the outer light. They were well yellowed by age yet the writing was decipherable. At first sight his discovery appeared to be of little value. The sheets were only a small bundle of accounts in the sharp scrawl of The Tiger. One or two were notes on loans to the tenants. Another was the record of a deal in opium. A third and fourth were for corn he had sold. But the next—what was this? It brought the youth to a sudden halt.

"To The Feathered Hen," it ran, "for the Lew girl, due taels 20."

Lew-chee's eyes swam, and his head grew dizzy as he read the words. An almost forgotten memory rushed in upon him. In a vague way he always remembered that he had had a sister. The remembrance was also a happy one. He still had some touches of joyous emotion at the thought of romps they had had

together in days gone by. But to him, as to his brothers, his sister had long been dead. The robbers had spread the rumour that after her capture she had run away one night, leaped into a stream and had been drowned. That was a common way with unhappy women in the land, so the neighbours and the brothers had accepted the report and the women folk had added, "'Twas well." No one had investigated the matter further. In a time of such turmoil what mattered another life, especially that of an orphan girl from the hills?

And now to Lew-chee flashed the thought that his sister might still live, but where?

"The Feathered Hen and his men might know," he muttered, "but where are they? Robbers there are in abundance, but I have not heard of this bandit now for years. Still if I venture forth might I not find him, and then my sister?"

He looked again at the faded paper. In a part of it he had not noted before were a few so-called grass characters—the shorthand of trade. With some difficulty he read, "Wong Ngan-kwei, Chengtu."

Chengtu, he well knew as the great provincial capital distant but a few days' journey. In the euphonistic manner of choosing names in his land Wong Ngan Kwei meant the "pacifier of the nation." Who was this Wong? Was it to him his sister had been sold for twenty ounces of silver? If so, then what an irony in the name, Wong, the Pacifier—the Demon!

Again he carefully scrutinized the frail pages. He even returned to the iron idol and made further careful search. Nothing more, however, could he discover to unravel the tragedy. Next morning early he went down to the city on the plain to consult with his

brothers. They expressed their surprise, but were not stirred as was he. It was possibly their sister, but, then, who could tell?

"The Feathered Hen has carried off hundreds of unhappy women," said one. "And the name of Lew is common, too."

"But," persisted Lew-chee, "The Tiger's connection with the case is good proof."

"True," was the reply, "but who could find a girl once she has entered the great capital, and that after ten years? If she were alive she must surely have found some way of letting the fact be known. No, she must be dead by drowning, as stated at the time, or in some other way. You had better burn the paper and go back to the temple. No good can come of prying into The Feathered Hen's affairs. On the other hand there might be untold danger."

Thus reasoned the brothers, now settled in business with their small funds and with families to be protected. Still if Lew-chee *must* go on such a search, they would supply a small sum of money to aid him.

That night the youth again sought the aged abbot. Here he found more sympathy. Out of his wide experience the old man knew well the ways of the world, and the probable fate of a young girl once considered a chattel. A boy might be adopted into some sonless family—but a girl! She might be sold as a secondary wife, as a slave, or sent far down to the great coast cities.

"Ten years, ten years," meditated the old man, "truly it is a long time, and she is probably long dead. But you shall go. You shall go. To find a man named Wong amid the myriads of a great city, and his sojourn there a decade since, is all but futile,

but it should be attempted. The Merciful One would have us show mercy. All life is precious.

"You are a stranger to the world and to the great capital. I know it well. I have friends of other days there. The monks of the brotherhood, they, too, will aid you and give you shelter. I will give you letters to them. You shall start on the morrow."

That night Lew-chee knew no sleep. He was full of preparation. Many perplexities mingled themselves with strange expectations. Never in his score of years had he been beyond the small city at the foot of the ranges. Now, he was to venture forth to the vast plain and the great capital. Who could tell what lay before him? Men went forth and never returned. The way was beset with dangers, soldiers and robbers and dire diseases. Yet to find the sister with the gentle smile—that were worth braving many things. And the long dead mother? Aye, she would approve.

V

THE "FLYING SWALLOW"

NEXT morning as Lew-chee stood ready to cross the temple threshold there was little to burden him. Though it was midsummer, he was going forth bareheaded and barefooted save for the rough, straw-sandals that shod his soles. His shins and much of his lower limbs, too, were bare, the rest and his loins were girt about with baggy, cotton trousers. A loose tunic of the same material covered his body, the right shoulder and arm which were left uncovered for the sake of coolness. A small white pouch with the abbot's letter and a few hundred cash hung around his waist concealed by the short tunic. His luggage was an oil-paper umbrella and a small attached bundle with a change of clothing, especially a longer gown to be worn when he reached the capital.

He had said his farewells the previous evening and was up before dawn. Away in the distance he heard the big bells ring out the greeting of another day as he descended the path. He reached the small city at the foot of the hills, early, and sought out his brothers. They had little to say since the abbot had approved; so they gave him some food, a few hundred more cash and their parting platitude,—“Go slowly.”

He was soon out on the road that led across the great plain and through many villages and large, walled towns which lay between his home and the capital, two days' distant. The day was hot and the road

dusty, but his heart was eager and strong. Sideroads crossed everywhere leading to farm homes, fields and market-places, and as there were no fences he might readily have gone astray. Still it was rarely necessary to inquire the proper turning for the great mass of the traffic and the well-worn ruts indicated plainly the main artery. Ever coming and going were travellers like himself, on foot, on horseback, on wheelbarrows or in sedan-chairs borne by two, three or four carriers, according to the wealth, weight, or dignity of the passenger. En route, too, were many merchants, coolies, farmers bearing cloth, fruits, vegetables, chickens, indigo and furs, salt and water ladles slung from shoulder-poles in various forms of crates and boxes. Cows and other pack animals also crowded past with big bags of rice or panniers filled with coal, upon their backs, while barrows groaned and grated with great loads of tobacco, bamboo-poles and squealing porkers.

At times his feet became tired and dusty, but it was always easy to step aside for a moment to the streams that ran gurgling and galloping by the roadside, and if other refreshment were needed, then one might stand a moment by the stalls of sellers of peanuts, sugar-cane, plums, apples, grapes, bean-curd and many other varieties of small stuff scattered all along the countryside for public accommodation. In the villages, too, there were always teahouses, big, open shops with square tables, each surrounded by backless benches where one might sit and sip tea all day for a few cash.

"It is all very fascinating," Lew-chee soliloquized, "especially the stretches of green rice-fields, rank and rich in promise, the squads of farmers with their long

rakes singing as they work and plod knee-deep in slush and water. And those lazy water-buffaloes all hidden save for horns and nose in the pools from the midday heat, the endless groups of plume-like bamboos; the farmhouses with chickens, dogs, ducks and women appearing and disappearing through the outer gateways."

He scarce noted the day passing, and well before the sun went down he had finished his thirty miles' tramp—the first stage upon his journey.

Casual travelling companions went to the inns, there to be enveloped with indescribable smells, suffocated with heat and bitten by unnumbered varieties of bugs and insects. He, more fortunate, found out a temple to which his abbot's card gave him, if not enthusiastic welcome, at least entrance.

"Custom calls for a night's lodging and a meal free to the brotherhood," said the sole priest of the temple. But as he showed very evident signs of poverty, Lew-chee paid him a small sum, securing thereby much better treatment and more detailed information for his further journey.

That night, the rain fell as only it can fall in this part of the world,—in torrents, in floods. As the temple was well roofed with tiles, however, Lew-chee suffered little from the storm and was ready betimes for his journey on the morrow. The rain was still falling briskly, which caused considerable delay. But by the time the morning meal was ended, the big drops had ceased, so he, with others, made his way out through the great city gates and a small suburb into the open country.

The party had not gone far when they discovered that its journey was to be a slow one. The little

streams which yesterday had raced so rollickingly by the roadside were now full in flood and rushed recklessly hither and thither, overflowing rice fields, farmyards and village streets indiscriminately. As for the roads, they were, in most places, no longer visible. Dirty, mud-laden streams now flowed where formerly had lain the dust and swept past with liberal loads of straw, leaves, weeds, and other debris. To travel was almost impossible. Yet Lew-chee was anxious to proceed, and rolling his loose garments well up to his thighs, joined the small band of adventurers. It was progress by faith and feeling, rather than by sight. A companion and he were fortunate enough to seize a bamboo pole as it floated by, which gave them considerable aid. Painfully feeling their path by soundings and observation of the misfortune of others, they made their way forward. But it was well after noon before they reached the first village, a distance of but six miles.

"It is useless to attempt to go further," said Lew-chee. "I am entirely of your opinion," returned his companion.

That night Lew-chee was forced to spend at an inn as there was no temple of his sect in the small market. This inn was well populated by mosquitoes, and abounded in odious smells.

It required no rising bell to awaken him from his slumbers the next morning. Pigs, chickens, rats and a gang of gamblers in the next room had aroused him at intervals all through the night. The rain had changed to sunshine, and he, with others, were away with the dawn. Water still lay in stretches along the wretched roadway, but was draining off rapidly into fields and ditches. By ten o'clock the sun was sending forth

its scorching strength and the ever-increasing streams of travellers were illustrating the proverb, that "summer knows no princely man," by stripping to the waist. By noon Lew-chee reached a small market-village, not ten miles distant from the capital, and his heart began to beat wildly with contending emotions. Hope was there that he might yet find the kind sister with his mother's eyes, and fear was there that his efforts might fail.

He sat down in a tea shop at one of the square tables near the open front and watched the throng. It was market-day and the people were out in numbers. In the narrow streets, men and women were bartering for pigs, bamboo-poles, carrots, chickens, straw-hats, sandals, umbrellas and fans. The shops, likewise, were overflowing with purchasers of tobacco and tea, rice and bean-curd, cotton-cloth and medicines, incense sticks, paper images and candles. He who had spent his life among the hills, wondered how so many people could pass to and fro, and yet through their midst howling, pushing, often reviling and still on the whole good-natured, crowded the carriers of baskets slung on poles, wheelbarrows laden with tobacco or woodware, cows burdened with rice and coal, and sedan chairs of many designs and dignity.

"How any one can possibly hear what another says," thought Lew, "seems to me utterly beyond comprehension."

Indeed some of them evidently thought as Lew did, and made no attempt, but resorted to a time-honoured custom, born perhaps of such necessity, and made their bargains by holding up their fingers as counters, or gave additional secrecy by concealing their clasped hands under long sleeves.

Suddenly there was a hush. It was as though some sorcerer had suddenly waved his magic wand over the crowd. No one seemed to know quite what had happened. Then the rattle of rifles rang out.

"Robbers!" ran the whispered word along the street.

The men stood stolid. Women shrieked and shuddered. Mothers snatched their children from among the surge and fled into the backrooms of the shops. Some of the keepers attempted to put up their shutters. Again there was a hush. A man in soldier's uniform had mounted a merchant's counter by the street-side and was giving orders. Lew-chee thought it might be an effort to quiet the crowd and assure them there was no cause for fear. But no, it was an order that all were to pass immediately to the west, and out of the village. To enforce his orders the soldier levelled his rifle and the mass of people began to move. Lew-chee stood up and moved with the others. Soon these uniformed robbers were to be seen, all along the street, hurrying the people forward. Some unfortunates were beaten with the barrels and butts of guns or prodded by bayonets, but, in the main, the mass moved forward sullenly, terrified by the incessant firing on both sides, and from the rear.

Lew-chee had been almost through the village when he entered the tea shop, so he now found himself near the rear of the motley procession as it wound its way through the streets. Looking back he saw but a score of men in uniform and wondered that so few could overawe a whole village. But he soon discovered that those he saw were not all. Others without military attire were going in and out of the shops and rooms to the rear, gathering up all desirable goods into bun-

dles, dragging out defenceless women and children and aged people, or, as he could not but surmise, from frequent shots and frenzied shrieks, dooming many others to a heartless death. Pushing along, the crowds separated slightly to pass the village well that stood half-surrounded by an old stone railing, right in the centre of the street. Lew-chee heard a shriek and stood as one petrified to see a well-dressed woman step upon the curb, then suddenly throw herself backwards into the waters below, dragging a grown-up girl with her as she fell. He struggled to free himself from the throng that he might go to the rescue, but without success.

"Will no one save those unfortunate women?" he cried; but no one heeded him.

He looked for someone to make the attempt but no one even looked toward the tragic spot. Who dared? Another burst of shots rang out from the rear, accompanied by wild threats, and the mass lunged forward, struggling for life. Some tried to escape by rushing down a small alley, but were driven back with sword slashes and curses. The village had been surrounded and there was no escape. Only the helpless old, and equally helpless children were allowed to pass through the net, and even these were stripped of clothing, shoes, cash, spectacles and other articles which the caprice of gangs of camp-followers might fancy.

Arrived at the end of the village, Lew-chee saw another scene of wretchedness. The crowd had been driven to the only bit of high ground in the neighbourhood, namely the graves of their dead. There a gang of villainous-looking men in all sorts of uniforms surrounded them. They were armed with rifles, swords, spears, pistols, and numbered now about one

hundred. Others similarly accoutered were passing to and fro driving or dragging the mass in single file through a gap in the ranks where each was being systematically searched. Outside these, again, was a motley crowd of camp-followers who received the spoils and the occasional victims who were to be held as "fat pigs" for ransom or other fate.

The raid was well organized. Pigs, chickens, clothing, cash, rice and radishes, merchants and maidens, all that cupidity desired, were selected from the mass and started forward towards the robbers' den. The others, after a few parting shots and threats, were free to return to gather the fragments of home-belongings and fight the flames which were raging in the central part of the village.

Lew-chee had little to lose. His outer garment, his bundle of reserve clothing and the small store of cash in his wallet had been quickly seized. He thought he was free, when suddenly one of the ruffians seized him from behind.

"Lead that pig along," peremptorily ordered his captor.

"I know nothing of such work," began Lew, "and you have no right to—"

A blow from the butt end of a rifle sent him reeling into a rice field. He picked himself up quickly, and though covered with mud and slime, hastened to attach himself to the pig for protection.

The sun was still in the zenith as they started their journey. All through the sultry afternoon they wound along unfrequented roads, muddy and almost impassable from the recent rains. They were apparently making for the hills, still miles in the distance. What a motley throng they were—squealing pigs, sullen men,

sobbing women, cackling chickens, cursing camp-followers, drunken, domineering robber-soldiery! Lew-chee's mind ran back to the years when as a youth he went to and fro, a messenger from The Tiger to the haunts of The Feathered Hen and his brood. He did not fear greatly for himself. Provided he did not balk the will of his captors again, he would probably be simply buffeted about as a coolie and later become a camp follower to accompany other raids. But these poor merchants, maidens, and little children! He could see them all corralled indiscriminately in some dirty temple courtyard, half-starved, vermin-infested, rendered utterly wretched by alternate cold and heat. He could see them daily or nightly being dragged out singly, or by twos, or dozens, at the caprice of their captors for torment and torture, returning to tell their comrades of unnamable cruelties or not returning at all!

"What fiends men can be!" thought Lew-chee. "Was not the Buddha right? Life? Is it not simply a suffering, a sorrow, a delusion based on a mad desire? Is not this but another example of Confucius' beautiful but baneful fancy that the world might ever be made better? For two thousand years his doctrines of benevolence and righteousness and propriety have been proclaimed throughout the nation and here are men still as brutal as beasts of prey! The Buddha-that-is-to-be—"The Laughing Buddha"—might find some new solution, but he—ah, he is still so far away!"

Thus Lew-chee meditated as he moved slowly along, his porcine companion ever protesting, plunging aside into some rice-field, or planting his feet down stubbornly in defiance of further progress. At first he laboured hard to keep up with the procession, fearing

he would receive more blows from his captors. But gradually new thoughts came to him. Was there any hope for these poor wretches driven off thus to their fate? Possibly the friends left behind in the village would make an effort to redeem them by bribes, but that would save them all too slowly and some, never! Someone might report to the soldiers at the capital, but who would dare? And then, who would know the road the robbers had taken? Another thought sprang into his mind. His sister had once so suffered. Others, many, had sisters here! Could he escape? Could he save them?

It did not require a subtle plot. By simply making a great show at urging on his reluctant charge he began gradually to fall behind. The crowd passed on. The soldiers, anxious to be in with the mass of the booty, cursed him for a while then appointed a couple of camp-followers to remain as guards. When night came he was well behind and the pig refused to move. The guards, anxious to miss nothing, turned aside into a wretched hut, tied Lew-chee and the pig firmly with the same rope and departed to share in the revel, threatening to break his leg-bones and other dire vengeance should the pig be missing in the morning.

They said nothing about his own escape. They had apparently no suspicion of that. They had simply taken the pig-rope, passed it over a couple of poles in the low roof of the shack and then bringing Lew's hands behind his back bound them together by crossing and tying his thumbs, adding a little water to the knot to make sure it would not slip. They had not gone long when Lew-chee, whose thoughts had been long active, began to move. He tried to reach the pig which was lying wearily on one side of the hut. This,

however, he could not do, the distance of the two poles preventing an approach. There was no hope, therefore, that he could untie his fellow-prisoner. He tried the frayed ends about his thumbs. They were already beginning to swell and sting with each movement. The water had done its work well and was constantly baking the knot tighter, more secure. He tried to force his body through his arms with the hope that he might thus get his hands in front and ease the cords with his teeth, but try as he would standing, sitting or prostrate he could make no progress.

The sweat began to stand out upon him as he realized that he was a prisoner. He had heard of the "Flying Swallow" where prisoners are strung up by their thumbs. His keepers had evidently that cruelty in mind when they bound him. He stood there for a long time, thinking. What a plight he was in! What wickedness was in the hearts of men! Why had they done this? Because they wanted to drink, to gamble, to carouse. Yes, life was surely a mixture of sin, and suffering, and sorrow! And at its basis was what? Desire, lust; yes, life was lust!

"When I am free," he mused, "I will go back to the old abbot and admit it. I will take the vows of the priesthood and destroy these devils of delusion, of sight, and sound and desire."

But how could they be destroyed? By meditation, by shutting them out utterly through enlightenment. How foolish to think that men with instincts of demons could ever be reformed! Confucius was wrong. Only the Buddha had light on this riddle of existence!

But pain was not to be thus so suddenly set aside. At first, he felt it only in his thumbs, now it was intense in hands, wrists, arms. The mosquitoes,

moreover, which he had not noticed at first, soon swarmed about him in thousands. He could not even free himself to brush them from his body, his arms, his face. And he was getting cold. He had been hot enough in the heat of the day, and had sweated profusely. But he had fallen or been knocked into the rice-fields and his upper garments were gone. It was still sultry, yet he was cold, and be the cause physical or psychological, he shivered.

Alternately he tried to stand, to walk, to sit, to lie down. There was no escaping the maddening pain, the heat, the cold, the tormenting mosquitoes. Then the pig began to stir. He, too, was apparently being pestered and was restless. He got up and commenced to root about. A sudden jerk of the rope brought to Lew-chee a new realization of danger. Should his companion decide to move about, to leave the shack, then it was a swine's strength against the resistance of his aching arms and tortured body.

There was another period of suspense while the animal apparently ruminated how best to prolong the agony. Then he slowly wandered to a corner, tightening the rope as he went. With a slow grunt of satisfaction he stretched himself out for another sleep and Lew-chee found himself on tiptoe strung up to the pole in the tortures of the "Flying Swallow." He groaned and tugged at the string, but could exert little strength. His efforts evidently fell unheeded on the pig. What a gehenna, he meditated—a human being linked to a hog in a vermin-infested hut.

"Save, O Buddha!" he cried in his misery. "Save, O goddess of Mercy! Save, O Amitabha! Save, little Hunchback! Save, O long-dead mother! Save!"

For an hour or what seemed to be such he swooned

or slept or sweltered in agony. Then the swine moved again. He was once more awake and guided apparently by some ray of light began to move toward the door. As he did so, the rope slid along the poles near the roof and led Lew-chee to the wall. The shack was but a frail structure, a framework of poles, sides of bamboo matting and a cover of straw. Lew-chee hesitated but a moment, then threw himself against one of the supports with all his strength. He felt it totter, then tumble with a crash, himself, among the ruins.

VI

"FAT PIGS"

LEW-CHEE knew no more till he was awakened by the curses and kicks of the two camp-followers. It was daylight and they had returned. The pig had been caught in the falling mass and lay comfortably among the straw. His captors had cut the rope from his hands, removed a pole that lay across his head and were ordering him to get up. Slowly he obeyed, staggering to his feet, his swollen arms hanging numb and motionless by his sides. His guards, flushed with wine, laughed hilariously at his discomfiture. He tried to speak but found his tongue almost too thick for utterance. It started again the thirst which had tortured him during the night.

"Give me water," he cried entreatingly to his guards.

"There is the water in the rice-field. Drink that," said one of them with a brutal laugh.

Staggering forward, he fell on his knees and drank desperately. Again his guards chuckled, waited a few minutes, then slashing him with the end of the rope ordered him up. As he slowly found his way to his feet, his arms refusing any assistance, they made a noose of the rope and threw it about his neck. Soon he was *en route* again, half-dragging the unwilling porker, while his tormentors followed, urging him along with much cursing and occasional prods at the pig.

Noon found them at the entrance to a village. Here, from signs of feasting and fragments of conversation, he surmised the majority of the prisoners and booty had been placed. After a short halt they were about to enter when a couple of sedan-chairs, in which were two apparently well-dressed women passed, followed by a half-dozen soldiers on foot and an officer riding a mule. The officer, evidently noticing the pig as he passed, spoke a word to an attendant, who ordered Lew-chee and his guards to follow. The latter obeyed instantly, and began hustling their prisoner forward. Leaving the village they turned into a side-path and an hour later were entering the foothills. After a couple of hours, and much climbing, they came to a small temple neatly situated among trees at the end of a small, precipitous valley. The two sadly-wearied prisoners were handed over to the guards at the big doorway. These, in turn, turned them over to others inside, and Lew-chee saw no more of his drunken torturers. The pig was led somewhere aside and the youth was at last free to sit down and rest his weary, swollen limbs.

No one seemed to pay any heed to his presence. He presumed there was no exit save by the main door and that was well guarded. From the sight of the chairs and the mule which he now saw within the courtyard, he presumed that this was the headquarters of the leaders of the gang. Fragments of conversation slowly confirmed him in his surmise. The officer he had seen, was, he learned, chief in command, and he presumed the women were his wives. Then a new thought came to his mind. There would probably be a priest somewhere, and he began to wonder how he might find him. Wandering about, he located him at last, a poor,

wretched, badly-frightened fellow, but of fair intelligence.

Lew-chee tried to draw him into conversation. At first he could secure no replies.

"I, too, am of the temple brotherhood and in trouble," said Lew-chee.

"Be silent," muttered the priest, "and follow me."

He led Lew-chee into a small side-room and there listened to his story.

"There are two of us attached to the temple," said the priest when Lew-chee had finished. "My associate has gone over wholly to the robbers and is acting as one of their decoys. I, too, have to pretend to be in full accord; but, inwardly, I loathe it all, and long to be free. But there is little chance of escape; spies are everywhere."

Later he brought Lew-chee some welcome hot water for his aching limbs and hands, a bowl of rice and a cob of corn. The youth ate ravenously. He had had no food since the previous noon. Some tea also was provided, but change of garments, save a short vest-like jacket, could not be found. The loot had been left in the village. Yet Lew-chee inwardly rejoiced. "I have found a friend," he confided to himself.

Food, and a good night's rest, did much for the youth. He had fallen asleep shortly after his conversation with the priest and slept far into the next day. He might have gone on sleeping had it not been for the same individual, who, when he awoke, he found bending over him. After the bewilderment born of the strange surroundings and the strange face had passed, he realized that the priest was asking him a question. It was a simple one! "Can you write?"

"I can," Lew-chee answered, and his answer ap-

peared to please his companion. He left the room and in a few minutes returned seemingly well satisfied, and motioned Lew-chee to follow him. To the youth's surprise he was led out into the central court and along the side to the upper part of the building where some men were seated about a table, drinking, smoking, and talking.

"He has come," said the priest, addressing one whom Lew-chee recognized as the officer he had seen riding the mule on the previous day.

"Can you write well?" demanded the latter in a loud voice.

"Not well," replied the youth, bowing low, "but I will do my best to serve your highness."

"Bring him that writing stuff!" the officer commanded a guard who stood by his side. The guard did not move, but repeated the order to another and he to a third, who disappeared and soon came forward fetching the materials. They were some rather inferior Chinese paper, a large, stone ink-slab, the stub end of a round ink-stick, a small, wooden vase holding three sadly frayed Chinese pen-brushes and a broken bowl containing water.

"Write," was the laconic command. The crowd about the table watched as Lew-chee, still much encumbered by his swollen thumbs and fingers, poured water on the slab, rubbed the ink-stick thereon until an appropriate paste was obtained, adjusted one of the pens as best he could, and wrote: "To write his master's meaning, heals the slave's hands."

It was apparently a happy turn for the youth. The flattery pleased the chief, and seeing this the men seated at the table laughed heartily. The writing, too,

seemed satisfactory, so Lew-chee was ordered to sit down.

At first a few questions were put to him as to who he was, which Lew-chee answered truthfully. That he was only a wandering temple-attendant, again seemed satisfactory and matters proceeded. He was told briefly that there were two "fat pigs" recently brought into camp. They were very fat. They were the wife and the daughter of a general who lived in the capital. Lew-chee recalled the two well-dressed women he had seen ride past in sedan-chairs as he had halted at the entrance of the village, but he said nothing. Now, he was told, a letter must be prepared in proper form to impress the general and his family that the captured were in danger of life, health, honour, and many other things, and that a large sum of money must be given at once for their release. As an alternative to these demands, the whole band of about two hundred men with their guns were to be taken into the general's army as regular soldiers and their commander to be given the rank of brigadier-general. If either of these terms were complied with immediately, the women would be handed back at a certain time and place, perfectly unharmed; if not, then the general might imagine the consequences. Desperate men knew no law and no degrees.

Lew-chee listened and understood. He was to put all this in a most convincing form. There were doubtless those who could read in the gang, and possibly write a few characters, but he had been summoned to give the demands a literary flourish, and impress the general that he had to do with men of ability as well as daring. As he set about his work, the conversation among the leaders continued. How much ransom

should be demanded? That was the chief topic at present. Back of that, was the question as to how much the general was worth? That, too, brought out many differences of opinion.

"Why not fetch out the 'pigs' and make them squeal?" one suggested.

"Good," the others agreed, "it will be rare sport anyhow."

The guard was sent to a sideroom with orders to another guard who, gun in hand, stood by a closed door. The latter in a loud voice called to those inside to open the door. With but little delay the command was obeyed. Those within were next ordered to come out and appear before "His Excellency" for trial. Again there was but brief delay and two women came forth.

There was a hush at the head of the courtyard as they approached. Looking up, Lew-chee saw a woman, presumably in middle life, followed by a young girl in her teens. Both were neatly dressed in silks, though not lavishly so, and as they advanced he noted that both had unbound feet, thus enabling them to step forward naturally and not with the hampered hobble of so many of their countrywomen. He could not but note, also, the calm that seemed to possess each of them. He had expected hysterical weeping and an advance only under compulsion; but these two seemed remarkable for their self-possession and courage. Arrived before the strange tribunal, they halted. Someone spontaneously placed seats for them, but they remained standing.

"Be seated!" commanded the chief, apparently ill at ease.

"Sit down!" echoed two or three subordinates. But the women remained standing.

"Please be seated," the chief repeated, becoming still more confused.

"We are your prisoners, not your guests," replied the elder woman.

"No, no!" he expostulated, "the high lady must be mistaken. Others may be prisoners, but the lady and her daughter are only detained a few days that we may return them safely to our master, the general."

The two still remained standing and silent. "His Excellency," the robber chief, hesitated and a redness, not wholly of wine, suffused his face. He made another attempt at diplomacy.

"Of course the country is very unsafe, as your ladyship knows," he said. "It will be impossible to have you return to your home at once. Your presence with us will mean considerable expense as we must give you attention according to your rank. We are just writing the general, and you will be glad to add a request for a small sum for yourself and daughter. What shall we suggest to him? Would \$500,000 each be sufficient?"

"You mean you want that sum as ransom for us?" asked the elder of the women, looking the chief squarely in the eye.

The chief stammered something about expenses, not ransom.

"Then please understand plainly. First, General Chang is not a man of wealth, for he has not made his position a means of getting gain as have some. Next, he will not yield to force, though he might to courtesy."

"Courtesy, courtesy?" repeated the chief, his confidence returning slightly. "Certainly, no one would attempt to use force against the general." Here he

attempted a laugh, which was echoed loudly by his henchmen.

One of the latter seized the occasion to whisper something to his chief, who continued: "We are greatly indebted to the lady for her teaching. Perhaps she will tell us what best to do."

"Tell me plainly what you want," she said, after a moment's hesitation. "Is it money alone?"

"Since our lady asks so plainly we will answer plainly," the leader replied. "We want money, but we also want to be recognized as part of the army. I must be made a colonel, at least, and my under-officers and men all given proper rank and position. It is not a big thing to ask. It is being done daily."

"Then, if that is your real meaning," the general's wife replied slowly, "you will take a letter from me to my husband. I will tell him that, so far, you have treated us respectfully and what your wishes are."

"Good," answered the chief. "Good, good!" came from his followers.

"Write as the lady dictates," ordered the chief, addressing Lew-chee. "Tear up what you have written."

Lew-chee rose and bowed first to the chief and then to the lady.

"There is no need of his services," said the general's wife. "My daughter will write for me."

Mother and daughter now moved toward the table where Lew-chee sat. They spoke in low voices for a few minutes, then the young girl took the writing utensils and set to work.

Lew-chee stood by the table as one entranced. It was not surprise that a girl could write, that he felt. He had heard of modern schools and that the girls of

the great cities were receiving the education of their brothers. It was something new stirring within him—something he had never before experienced. It was not the writing, but the writer. He had watched her furtively at first as she had come forward with her mother to the tribunal. He had been astonished at her courage, then as she stood before all, at her calmness and poise. He soon found himself under some charm, wrought by dark eyes, long eyelashes and dark, glossy hair. He had never known that his countrywomen could be so beautiful. The maidens of the mountainside, the occasional girls of the small city who had ascended the hills to the temple, they had aroused in him but small interest. They were too often tattered, ignorant, silly or sulky. But here was a creature who seemed of another creation. As she came closer and sat at his desk, her graceful hands, her well-rounded arms, her darkly flushed skin, sent a thrill through him like the sudden intoxication of strong wine. He almost staggered as, the writing finished, the maiden rose, and pushed it toward him for transmission to his chief. A few minutes later he saw the two women return to their quarters and came back to reality again as the door closed behind them.

Yes, he was back to reality again. There were the same dirty guards, the robber soldiers in their badly torn uniforms, the group drinking and smoking about the chief at the table above him. They were reading again the girl's letter to her father. He was not wanted, forgotten for the moment, and he fell into reverie. His mind went back to the experiences of these last two days. They seemed a dismal nightmare. He shuddered as he recalled his experiences in the shack. He, a human tethered to a pig, and the latter

by means of brute strength, the master. And the next day he had been driven along the road all day long, a slave to the pig and the two drunken coolies! Now he was a prisoner, a serf to this brawling band! And these bandits themselves, in all their wild disregard of law and custom, were they free? No, they, too, were slaves, slaves to their superiors, to circumstance, to appetite, to their desires. Ah, there was that word again—desire!

"It always came back to the same fact," he reflected. "The abbot, the Buddha, were right. Life is but a sickness, a sorrow, a snare. Man is manacled by desire. The only way to freedom lies in annihilation of all that binds us to life. Life is a lie! Its desire is a delusion!"

Then his thoughts turned to the two women who had stood in their midst. They, too, were prisoners? Yes, but there was a strange difference. He saw again the advance toward the tribunal, calm, courageous. He saw the mother stand forth unabashed, self-confident, in simple words conquering her captors. Then that strange emotion suffused him once more as he thought of the girl, so gentle, so graceful, so glorious, yet so natural, so true to herself! They were at least free in their inner souls. They were not wholly slaves to circumstance! And then, and then, if these could be so, might not the whole world be similarly free? What a world that would be, full of women such as these assuredly were! And if women, then why not men? What a world that would be, a world of knowledge, and health, and courage, and calm self-control! Now, he was back to Confucius again. Confucius had held out the hope of such a world at least for the educated few. But even the great Sage had wholly

omitted women! Here were women who seemed to have found the secret. What could it be? Was it possible that the Buddha-that-is-to-be, had already come? How could he ever know—how could he obtain their secret?

As his thoughts had thus run on his head had fallen upon the table before him. He was roused from his reveries by a smart slap on his cheek. His captors had found a character in the young girl's letter which they could not understand, and his assistance was demanded. He read this, then stood by till the letter was finished. There was silence for a time. Then a dispute arose as to whether they should send the letter. The words seemed clear and fair enough. They simply stated the mother's thought: They were prisoners; so far they had been treated courteously; their captors wished to be taken into the army as officers and men, or to receive money. Would the father tell his terms? But the very simplicity roused suspicion in the minds of some of the party. Why should any one state things so openly, directly? There should be more subtlety, more craft!

"The woman already has had too much of her own way," said one. "Now we are going to let a girl hood-wink us! Tear the thing up and bring out the original letter. That is the proper way to deal with owners of 'fat pigs.' Bring the two out again and put a little terror under their skins. Some women's tears and hair and blood and strips of torn garments, will move the old chap away down at the capital better than any of this simpering softness."

The dispute was in full swing when one of the crowd which had slowly gathered from many parts of the temple let fall what appeared to be a seemingly chance

phrase. "They are Christians," he said. "The Chang family are Christians." That was all, but it was followed by a profound silence.

The chief turned to the speaker who soon found himself the centre of attention. He, it appeared, was one of the robber spies and so his words were listened to with attention. He knew the family. The general's wife had been out visiting friends in the village when the raid took her and her daughter in the net. But he knew their home at a certain street in the provincial capital. He was not sure of the father, the general, but the mother and daughter were often to be seen attending the foreign church. The daughter, moreover, attended a school conducted by the foreign devils. That was to be seen by the dress she wore which had skirts, and in the fact that she could write letters. That, too, accounted for the women's bearing. They had foreign customs.

That turned the tide in favour of sending the letter as it stood. Evidently the chief, as did others, knew enough of the new religion to agree that those who professed it were accustomed to speak the truth. They would try it and see. The spy who had spoken was selected to see that the missive was delivered through proper subterranean channels. The incident was thus apparently closed until future developments might again demand attention.

VII

THE ESCAPE

THAT night Lew-chee lay on a bed in the priest's room, his head hot with thought. The events of the day had driven sleep far away. He recalled again and again the scene in the courtyard of the temple, the mother, the daughter, the letter, the dispute afterwards and the decision arrived at because the women were Christians. He had heard of the foreign sect before while in the mountain temple. But every one had spoken against it. He knew there was a small body which called itself such on a side street of his own small city. But the members were few and were known to be poor and ignorant. Quite a number had joined in past years to get employment from the new concern, to get cheap schooling for their children, or especially to be able to use the name and influence of a foreign society in collecting debts or escaping justice before the local magistrate. The latter hope it seemed had been short-lived and so the crowd had melted away and very few went near the place now.

Lew-chee had himself gone on two occasions to the small shop that acted as their Happiness Hall. He had listened attentively for he was ever on the search for knowledge. With slight variations each time the message was the same. The speaker declared with great force that all men were sinners because someone named Adam had eaten a forbidden fruit long ago. The speaker had claimed that Adam was the first man,

but Lew-chee had asked his old teacher and the abbot about the matter and they assured him that Chinese history knew nothing of such a man. Lew-chee therefore concluded that such sins could have nothing to do with him. If men were believers in Jesus, the speaker had further urged, they would go to heaven, if not, to hell, and pictured these places of happiness or torture in vivid terms. But Lew-chee liked the Western Heaven better as portrayed to him so sympathetically by the little Hunchback; and as for the torment of eternal fire as held before men by the Christian, that seemed but a mild *malaise* compared with the Hades of Buddhism, where ten halls were given over to every imaginable minutiae of interminable torture.

Often as a child he had spent hours in that part of the temple looking at the images as depicted by the idol-makers, fascinated by the awful horror of it all. Later, he had read the descriptions of the books, where court upon court was depicted in telling detail. One—not by any means the worst—read as follows:

“The Seventh Court: His Infernal Majesty Tai Shan reigns at the bottom of the great Ocean away to the north-west. His is a vast, noisy court measuring many leagues in circumference and divided into sixteen wards as follows:

“ ‘ In the first the wicked souls are made to swallow their own blood. In the second their legs are pierced and then thrust into a fiery pit. In the third their chests are cut open. In the fourth their hair is torn out with iron combs. In the fifth they are gnawed by dogs. In the sixth great stones are placed on their heads. In the seventh their skulls are pierced. In the eighth they wear fiery clothes. In the ninth their

skin is torn and pulled by pigs. In the tenth they are pecked by huge birds. In the eleventh they are hung up and beaten on the feet. In the twelfth their tongues are pulled out and their jaws bored. In the thirteenth they are disembowelled. In the fourteenth they are trampled by mules and eaten by badgers. In the fifteenth their fingers are ironed with hot irons. In the sixteenth they are boiled in oil.' "

No, as he reflected upon it, he could not see why he should be held accountable for some remote man's sins, nor could the Christian hopes of happiness or pictured punishments influence him to join their cult. His longings were for a better world here and now, where cunning and cruelty and crime might be banished, where peace and poise, prosperity and propriety might everywhere reign supreme.

And today! He seemed to have found two people who had, as it were, stepped out from that Elysian land.

"Ah me! Ah me!" he murmured, "what a world this might be were all women such as these—clean, chaste, intelligent, beautiful in body and soul—and all men their fitting fellows!"

His meditations were cut short by the entrance of his priest-friend. Lew-chee sat up. He knew his mission. The priest had assured him that escape was a matter of comparative ease so far as leaving the temple was concerned. The front approach was guarded, but they had but to open an old kitchen door, surmount a small stone wall scarce seven feet high and escape to the fields and forests on the other side. It was then the real trouble would be encountered as the people of the countryside were either in league with the robbers or so in terror of them that they would

not dare to render aid. But Lew-chee had no fears in that regard. He was a youth of the hills and had had his apprenticeship of the banditti and their ways long ago under the regime of The Tiger and his brood. He only asked for a few hints as to time and place, and the path and the future held no fears. He would make the break for freedom that night and now the hour had come.

"Is it well?" inquired Lew-chee in a low whisper.

"Most well," answered the priest, scarce lowering his voice. "There will be little attention by guards tonight."

He handed Lew-chee a few large unleavened cakes, and after a pause proceeded to explain the situation. Briefly it was this: The Feathered Hen himself had suddenly appeared upon the scene, and under his influence some of the old rank and file of the robber band were not satisfied with the afternoon's proceedings. They were not ready to follow their younger chief back into the army. He might get honour and position thus, but little of that would come their way. Moreover, some of them had tried it all and much preferred the untrammelled freedom of their present ways. They had accordingly sent messengers down to their comrades in the village below, telling them of the day's proceedings and calling upon them to come up the hill for action. There would be sure to be conflict, probably fighting, and the captain and his band of aides must submit to the will of the mass or fight. Already discussion was running high. Lew-chee had, therefore, only to wait a few minutes longer when the struggle would assuredly begin and then depart by any exit. But the way by the rear would be still safest as

others might be coming up the hill. He personally would see him safely over the wall.

"But the women?" The words came involuntarily to Lew-chee's lips. "What is that to you?" muttered the priest. "What have we to do with women? Come, let us go!"

Lew-chee stood up and began to arrange his cakes and other small articles for the journey. But he paused as his small bundle was completed. What were those women to him? He found, as the thoughts of the future rushed through his brain, that they were many things, almost everything to him. He thought again of the courtyard scene. He thought of scenes long ago of unhappy womanhood in the dens of The Feathered Hen. He thought of his own mother and his sister. No, he could not walk away callously and leave them to their fate. Were they but the meanest of their kind, he must make an effort to save them. How much more these two who seemed somehow to possess the secret of a new and better form of being. He threw down his bundle. He would go out into the courtyard and stand by to aid these women. He would somehow seize a sword or a gun and aid the younger chief. If need be he, too, could die, but he could not, would not, flee or falter.

In brief words he communicated his decision to the priest.

"Then there'll be another dead one to bury," was the response.

Lew-chee again paused. True, it would be but folly to fight. Better to stand aloof and later follow the women wherever they might be borne and seek to protect them. Perhaps he might foil a worse fate by appealing to greed or gain even amongst the worst ele-

ment. Yet who would heed him? He had forgotten that he, too, was a prisoner.

Then a new thought flashed upon him. He must secure their escape and his own, but how? Lew-chee voiced his determination to the priest. The latter only shook his head indifferently. Lew-chee appealed to his pity, his chivalry.

"Why trouble about other people's women?" responded the priest. "Let their own men-folk take risks for them. It is no concern of yours."

Lew-chee felt instinctively that he had soared too high. He struck a lower note, appealing to the priest's needs of food and clothing, old age which was coming on, a possible position in a better temple. To this the priest listened. Then the youth told him of his abbot and of his influence with him. The general, too, would doubtless have money and influence. He must surely lay high value on his wife and daughter. If these were saved, what might the general not bestow in the way of favours? On the other hand, were the women injured the facts would surely become known some day. Then this small temple and its priests would be—where?

It was not a task to be attempted rashly, but Lew-chee's passionate earnestness lent persuasion to his tongue. Slowly the priest yielded. But there was no time for delay. Already the voices of men, high in heated argument, could be heard from the courtyard. It was evident there would be no compromise and conflict must be soon. The women, too, must hear the loud discussion and realize their danger. Indeed, they might at any time be dragged forth, and then all hope of escape would be at an end.

The plans of Lew-chee and the priest were quickly formed.

"We shall assuredly be pursued," said the former, "so we must make some provision for our defence. We must secure some of the rifles if possible."

"I can do that best," said the priest, because I can venture into the open. Moreover, I have been forced more than once to carry arms in the company, so I can make a proper selection." He set about his dangerous task at once.

Passing out into the courtyard he found almost all crowded to the upper part where the chief and his aides stood upon the platform, the others bunched below, pressing forward ever more grim and gesticulating. The latter had evidently prepared to make the attack with pistols and swords, as guns would be dangerous to friend as well as foe in the *melée*. In one place the priest found a group of half-a-dozen rifles stacked in a side-room. Watching his chance, he bundled all into his arms and made his way by a side passage to the temple kitchen, and out through the small side-door to the wall. There, by means of a rope made from some old turbans, he lowered his loads to the ground on the other side.

Meantime Lew-chee had made his way along the top of the wall to the rear of the temple and then down the narrow passage on the outer side to the rooms where he knew the women must be. It took little trouble to find this as temple architecture in China is everywhere the same, and he had well in mind the location. The more difficult task was to begin. Fortunately the outer walls of the room were only of roughcast, bamboo laths covered with plaster. Awaiting a time when the riot was running high in the inner

courtyard, he made a sudden slash with a kitchen chopper and drove a small hole through the plaster.

He put his ear to the opening but all was stillness. He tried to peep through but all seemed dark.

"Lady, lady!" he whispered, putting his mouth to the opening, but there was no response. Had he mistaken the location after all? He examined the outline as revealed in the dim starlight and decided that there could be no mistake. Inserting the chopper again, he pried it slowly and soon had a larger opening. Again he listened and thought he could hear a low murmur of voices. Again he enlarged the opening and inserted his head. Slowly, as his eyes became adjusted to the light he saw two figures kneeling in the farther corner. Yes, it was they. Mother and daughter were bent together in prayer. Riot reigned ever louder without. These two held strange peace within. Lew-chee paused again, constrained into silence by the strange scene.

But in a moment he was all activity. There was no time for ceremony. "Lady, lady," he called again, struggling to make a wider opening. "Lady, come quickly, or you are lost."

Once aroused there was no need to tell the women of their danger. They realized the meaning of the struggle in the courtyard. They could not see the youth in the darkness as they approached the opening, but his kindly voice and courteous words were reassuring. He had no time to tell his story. He simply said that he, too, was a prisoner escaping and urged them to come. They could well see that they must decide quickly, as the fight in the courtyard could not last long.

As they spoke a pistol shot rang out. There was a

loud, fiendish shout, followed by piercing screams, oaths, blows. The fight was on. Quickly the hole in the outer wall was enlarged, and the mother and daughter came through. Lew-chee climbed to the top of the wall and called below. The priest had completed his work and was waiting. It took little time to draw the two light bodies to the top of the wall and lower them to the priest below. The youth followed with a quick leap. They were at least outside the enclosure. Would that the goddess of mercy or some good Buddha might guard and guide!

But again there was little time for reflection. Following the form of the silent priest in the dim starlight, they at once skirted the temple to the rear. There he handed a rifle each to the two women, two more to Lew-chee and retained two for himself. Immediately they began the ascent of the steep slope. For half an hour they twisted and turned and clambered and clung, moving ever upwards. Then they came to a cave, paused to rest, where the priest unfolded his plan.

"We shall surely be followed," he said, "and there will be little use hiding here. The whole countryside will be roused and search made until we are captured. But I have a plan. You three must descend the adjoining slope rapidly, push boldly through the cornfields and farms below, cross the river by the rope-bridge and seek safety among the mountains on the other side. Leave your guns with me. I shall need them all."

"I think I had better take one," said Lew-chee. "I might need it."

"That is so," answered the priest. "Yes; take one."

As he spoke the priest began arranging a few stones at the mouth of the cave and placing his rifles in position. His plan needed no further explanation. He expected to delude the robbers into the belief that the fugitives were armed and held the cave. That would gain time while the three made good their escape. They protested, but the priest began to drive them forth as though in half-anger. That was the best way to end the argument. He returned to his self-appointed task and Lew-chee and the two women departed.

At first they found no path. They clung to the scrub bamboo, small pines and one another, Lew-chee leading, guarding against precipices and pitfalls. At length they reached the corn-belt and breathed in relief. As they had descended, the shouting in the temple which had accompanied their upward flight seemed to die away. They interpreted this to mean that the fight within was at an end. They could have but little doubt as to the victors. The young chief and his small band were either dead or sadly wounded and prisoners. How long would their own escape evade detection. They rested but for a moment, then pushed on.

Suddenly a rifle rang out on the still, night air. They turned and listened. In a moment it was followed by other reports and shouting. They were descending at a point diagonal from the temple so could make out the cries, but as they came from the direction of the temple they had no doubt but that their escape had been discovered. Flares began to appear to their left and answering voices to arise. Before long this primitive signalling would discover them and they would be surrounded. A little later dogs were barking in many directions. Other flares soon fol-

lowed and voices from farther down the slope. Hope sank in Lew-chee's heart. He knew the mountaineers. They knew their mountains, every field and roadway. They would scatter in all directions to guard the crossings. Rare the wild boar that might escape such a net. How could he with two slowly moving women avoid such meshes!

Still he moved forward gripping his gun tightly, resolved to fight to the last. Just then another shot rang out, then, after a pause, another. There was a silence over the mountain. Distant voices began to call. Their repetition came near enough now to be understood.

"High up the hill," was the hailing word. The shots then were from the priest. He had noted his time and fired. The ruse was to work at least for a time. As they pressed downward the voices below came steadily upward. Three men passed them hurrying to the top. A little later they lay flat on the ground as several passed to their right. A dog bayed as a third party approached and Lew-chee thought all was at an end. But the group seemed too sure of their quarry at the summit to brook delay. They passed with a few muttered curses at the cur.

Firing was now proceeding regularly at the top of the mountain, answered by volleys from below. Flares showed the circle ever drawing nearer the summit. How long could the priest play such a game? A stray bullet might reach him at any time, and even though it did not, how long would his ammunition hold out? His firing lessened for a time, then burst forth again in rapid recovery. "Bless the priest," they all breathed. Half an hour more and they had reached the river's brink while the warfare still went forward.

"Our next business is to find the whereabouts of the single rope that spans the stream," said Lew-chee. "Hide behind these rocks while I make the search."

He tried to judge by the width of the water but could not see the other side. Then he discovered a path and judged that the rope must be above their position. After what seemed to be long hours of time he found it and started back for his companions. He did not dare to call and passed the place twice before he discovered them. That meant more delay which they could ill afford, but now they hurried to the rope.

To cross on such a primitive structure is always difficult and trying. A small hollowed block encircles the rope to keep it from wearing. To this the passenger binds himself with another rope, then swings out and slides or pulls himself slowly to the other shore. If there is a load, then the task is doubly arduous for that, too, must be carefully strapped and pushed ahead tediously. Lew-chee, however, was not new to such a situation. He had crossed at times on similar structures without aid of block or tackle, simply hanging monkey-like with body downward and clambering with hands and feet along the rope above. Now he made his plans quietly as they felt their way forward.

"Only one can go with me at a time," he whispered as they advanced. "The rope will bear but two. But I will return quickly for the second. There is no cause for fear."

There was little delay in the decision. "Then Mae Jen shall go first," came briefly from the mother.

"Mae Jen," it was the first time Lew-chee had heard the maiden's name, and despite the pressing dangers, he could not but pause a moment in his thought to wonder what might be the meaning. He learned it

later. It stood, as do most names in great China, for some fond hope. The words were Beauty and Truth, doubtless a mother's longing that her child might grow to womanhood, both beautiful and true.

"No, you must go first, mother!" replied Mae Jen. "I will not be afraid."

The mother whispered something which Lew-chee did not hear. When a moment later they reached the rope, all was settled. Mae Jen clung for a moment to her mother, then stepped forward to the swaying hawser. Lew-chee bound her with a few deft turns, hung the rifle about her shoulders, pointed to a huge rock dimly outlined a few steps farther up the stream as a hiding place for the mother, then threw a small rope about himself and pushed off.

They were soon moving rapidly as the great bamboo strands sagged toward the centre of the stream. Lew-chee knew the trick and kept his long arms running lively races as he sought to secure momentum for the coming up-grade. Below, the river raged wildly, spouts of leaping spray at times dashed upwards, flecking their feet, hands and faces. In what seemed to Mae Jen little more than a moment they were far out and the pace began to slacken. She felt her companion tugging hard and turned to note what he was doing. As she turned their faces touched in the semi-darkness. She turned back quickly and began also with her small hands to haul upon the big rope.

As for Lew-chee the touch sent a wild thrill through his whole frame. His muscles seemed as though by magic to lose their weariness, and he pulled with giant strength. He could not see the farther shore, but judged from the rope and the lessened roaring of the waters that they were nearing the other side. What

would await them there, he did not pause to think, but struggled gaily on, rejoicing despite the desperate situation, in his own strength and the fates which had guided his life to be preserver to the fair form before him. She, too, was adding her strength to the task, he noted, and he inwardly wished that the crossing might be prolonged indefinitely that he might catch glimpses of two little wrists as they came and went, and that he might feel her warm shoulders as her efforts brought her toward him. Even the rifle as it hung there seemed surcharged with a mystic energy.

Then of a sudden he roused himself from his reveries. Had he heard a sound? Yes, there it was again. Was it the snapping of the great rope strands under the strain? Again it came. This time there was no mistaking its nature. It was a shot. Was it before them or behind? He peered ahead but could see nothing. Then half turning he glanced behind. Was he dreaming or did he see torches? He dare not pause. But again a shot rang out, and again he turned. It was no dream. A band of men had reached the shore and listening, as they would, to the rope could readily tell that someone was crossing, indeed could almost locate their position with scientific accuracy.

"Pull," he whispered to the little form before him. "Pull, for your life, little sister. They're coming."

Again she half turned and he felt her warm breath upon his face. His elation of a moment before vanished. In his heart he swore an unconscious yet solemn oath, that while red blood ran, no robber would ever again touch so fair a form. It was well that he warmed himself to the task for as he paused a moment to peer ahead in search for the shore a new terror

came. He felt a sudden trembling of the great rope. There could be but one adequate explanation. Others were crossing, following them. He felt the throbbing of the big hawser as the pursuers came down the incline toward the sag in the center of the stream. He could hear the strands strain as though about to part. Then he could note the steady, strong strokes of his pursuers. They came steadily, surely on.

"Pull hard, and pray hard to your God," he again called to Mae Jen. "They are following us along the rope."

"Amita Buddha! Amita Buddha!" he added, memories of the little Hunchback and his faith coming strangely back in the hour of peril. "Ah, Amita, thou spirit of boundless age, if thou ever didst save, save now!"

He peered forward. There was still no sign of the shore-line. He groaned as he grasped the cable more desperately. The little body before him came again into contact as they struggled. She, too, was exerting all her strength, and he heard a murmured prayer as she swayed near him. He reached forth a hand for the gun. He would fight to the last, and then,—well then they would drop together into the raging stream below. Better death than capture and degradation.

The thought of the stream gave him a new inspiration. Quickly he reached for the remnant of rope that dangled by his side and bound himself more firmly to the cable. He felt again the strands that tied the maiden to the wooden trolley. With a deft turn or two they were satisfactory. Then he listened again to the pursuers. The latter had gained greatly. He even

thought he heard voices as the roar of the rapids lulled for a moment. There was no time to be lost.

"Hold tight with all your might, little sister," he called. Then seizing the old temple chopper which hung by his side, he swung it high in air, then brought it down upon the cable with all his strength. The taut strands snapped like a pistol shot. In a flash they were in the water with the rapids raging about them. Lew-chee clung with a grip of death to the girl and the cable. Their lives were with the gods. Would it be life or death? The answer came as suddenly. Something gave him a stinging blow upon his thigh. He looked and the shore rose above them. Hauling steadily in upon the cable he pushed his little charge ahead, stroke upon stroke. At length he found bottom for his feet and slowly aided her up the rocks to the shore.

"Thank God!" he heard her murmur. "We are safe! But what of poor mother, poor mother? Oh, we must now save mother!"

"Alas!" replied Lew-chee, "there is no returning now. We shall have to make other plans. Meanwhile we must hasten from here. Though foiled for the present they will no doubt seek other crossings and hound us down."

"They will expect us to follow this river path," he added after a moment of meditation. "We must foil them by ascending the mountain."

Mae Jen obeyed without parley. A little later and the pair were clambering among rocks and ledges, trees and lichens upward into the darkness that loomed high above them. Their wet garments gave but a gratifying sense of coolness, so they made good progress. Below the swift river thundered. An hour later and

the harvest moon rose red and slowly turning to silver touched all with mystic grandeur. Another hour and they could look far and wide over the valley to the great hills beyond. They spoke little. The maiden thought of her mother and prayed the great Power for protection. The youth, suddenly sprung to manhood, thrilled with a new sense of chivalry and turned over with startling speed a thousand plans for her safety.

VIII

THE TAOIST

SOME time in the night Lew-chee and Mae Jen came to a spot where a few larger trees formed a small grove on the rocky slope. Here they halted. With the old chopper which still hung at his side Lew-chee cut down a few evergreen branches and strewing them between a couple of huge roots invited his protege to rest. Withdrawing himself a few paces he leaned himself wearily against another trunk. There he might overlook the valley and the river now a silver stream far below. He thought to keep guard, but wearied nature would have her due. He did not recall how it happened but his head fell slowly forward, his body sunk slowly down, and he slept.

He awoke next morning with a start. The sun was peeping over the hills and shining full upon him. He rubbed his eyes and gazed quizzically at the gun that lay across his knee. Then memory came back with a rush and he sprang to his feet. Advancing a few paces he gazed upon the little form between the great up-turned roots. Jet black hair slightly dishevelled, a pure white arm with graceful hand and fingers outstretched upon the green boughs, long dark eyelashes falling down upon delicate pink cheeks, how beautiful she seemed as he gazed upon her! What a wonderful being a beauteous woman was.

"Why are the maidens of the hills so dirty and slovenly?" thought Lew-chee. "Is it only because

they are poor, with clothes so patched and soiled? Is it also because they are undernourished, deformed by heavy loads and the work of the fields they hoe? That might be it in part, perhaps, but it surely can not be all."

Then this girl, he knew, was educated. That perchance accounted for the difference. Why could not all the women of the land be well fed, well clothed, well educated, fair and pure as this little lotus flower that lay before him?

Then the thought of her danger came to him once more. He stepped forward to rouse her, then hesitated. He would let her sleep on a few minutes what time he sought some vantage spot from which to study the situation. He stepped back among the trees, then out through the smaller shrubbery to get an unobstructed view. From a jutting rock he gazed far out. All about, and below him were seemingly untrodden slopes of wild foliage—trees, bracken, shrubs—leading far down to little promontories of tasselled corn which, in turn, sloped down through numberless tiny glades to the valley. On the opposite bank the scene was similar save that the slope being more gentle the corn ran its invading forces farther up the ascent, and straw-thatched huts were many. On a slope a few miles away he saw what must be the temple from which they had come and thoughts of the grim scenes which now filled its courtyard held him.

Then he thought of the priest, and his eyes wandered far up the opposite slope. There was no sign of life. The spot might be anywhere on that ragged slope. And where was the comrade who had taken such risks for him? Not for the women—no—but for him. Surely that was heroic. Why should that frail

fellow-man risk his life for him—a stranger? There must be something noble in the human soul, aye, and something devilish, too. Robbers and heroes, women who were ghouls and women who were goddesses. What a world! Why should it be so? Doubtless the abbot was right. All were being repaid or punished for their good or evil deeds in a former life. How else could the mystery be solved?

Then his eyes fell on the river far below him. He could see the white foam tossing in the sunlight. Had he crossed that raging stream, then? It was well that it was night when he did so, and that the danger was hidden. And the mother of the girl who had crossed with him—where was she? A captive, doubtless. He consoled himself with the thought that her life at least might be spared. The robbers would for a time hold her for ransom. Nothing could be done at present. He would try to get the daughter away, and then he could return. . . .

He was startled by a cry from the trees he had left. It was Mae Jen's voice, and he rushed to her rescue. Had the robbers tracked them already to their hiding place? He raised his gun as he ran.

A few strides more and he caught sight of her. She had risen from her bed of boughs and was standing with her back to the big tree, her widespread arms seeking to embrace it. Another step and he saw the object of her alarm. It was a man with broad-brimmed, cloth hat, quite crownless, through which his knotted hair protruded. His body was covered with a long gown made of apparently ten score and more patches of various sizes and colours. In his left hand he held a large, irregular, wooden bowl, apparently cut from the gnarled root of some great tree, and in

his right a strange staff shod with a long chisel-like bit of iron.

Lew-chee's gun fell to his side and a smile supplanted his startled gaze.

"Do not fear, little sister," he called. "It is probably a friend. He is doubtless some Taoist seeker after the magic medicine!" Then he advanced and greeted the strange figure before them.

Lew-chee knew his type well. A Taoist temple surmounted a slope in the same valley in which he had spent his life. Centuries ago there had been rivalry between the Taoist and Buddhist sects, but long since both sects had ceased speculating, therefore ceased struggling and were at peace—the peace of indifference. His old teacher in the little school down in the valley had often told him of the eccentric sage, Lao-tsze, or Li, the old philosopher. Some years older than Confucius, he had reproved the latter for his feverish anxiety regarding the ways of the ancients and urged upon him a philosophical inaction. Truth, in action, the hoary-haired Li had declared, was seen in the Way of the World, and man's duty was simply to quietly and passively conform to this Way.

"But of all these things the Taoists of today knew little or nothing," his teacher had added. "They tell only the traditions of a founder who was already eighty years old when he was born; of the first Taoist Pope or Heavenly Scholar who hundreds of years later, in a certain cave in these very mountains, received a revelation from the Ancient Philosopher, and with it magic powers against demons and hobgoblins; and of the eight immortals who by means of mystic medicines and other formulæ were able to leave their bodies, assume strange shapes at will, ascend to the

heavens, go hither and thither to western ranges or eastern islands and then return to earth and their bodies once more."

The majority of the men Lew-chee had known were content to tend their idols, write charms, tell fortunes for passing worshippers, or stray away to the east to the dragon-tiger ranges where the descendant of the first pope claimed still to grant swords and brooms by which devils might be banished, or imprisoned in caves and crocks. A few, however, still clung to the hope that the magic lotion might be found by which they could become genii and fly to and fro upon the earth, guests by turns of the western mother in her mountain paradise or the eastern immortals in their crystal isles. These latter were wanderers on the earth, begging through city streets and country lanes, or climbing almost inaccessible mountain crests in search of the Golden Draught, and its ever elusive ingredients.

To this latter class, Lew-chee rightly surmised, this strange visitor belonged.

"Have you found the Golden Lotion, brother?" he asked as he approached the wanderer.

"No, I search and search, but cannot find," was the reply.

"Then can you tell me where water is to be found?" inquired the youth. "We have travelled far and are very thirsty."

"Higher up," was the Taoist's brief reply.

"Please lead us," said the youth, and as the strange searcher after immortality clambered slowly ahead, Lew-chee and Mae Jen followed him up the slope.

A little later they arrived at the mouth of a cave. Some boughs, a tattered cotton quilt, an old pot on badly blackened stones and a broken bowl or two

showed that this was the Taoist's temporary home. The place was far from inviting. Rags, piles of herbs and roots, dregs of strange decoctions afterward discarded, filth of various kinds strewed the spot. The searcher after the elixir of life was equally repellent at close range. He had, as they learned later, taken the vow to neither shave nor bathe again, the result being a wild air in several senses. But in one corner a little stream of clear cold water trickled down from a small crevice in the roof, and that was most welcome.

With a few ferns and small stones Lew-chee quickly formed a temporary basin in the rock and from this they drank refreshing draughts, then bathed their faces and swollen hands. The terror of the night had driven from them all thoughts of hunger, but now they felt its pangs and ate heartily of the little badly-soaked bundle of cakes which the kindly priest had provided from the temple.

Meat and drink, what magic they work in man, especially in the days of youth. The night before, while weary, they had spoken little. Now, refreshed with the morning sun shining full into the mouth of the cave, the springs of life burst forth afresh. It was hard to realize that danger lurked among such romantic surroundings. Their wild adventure of the night, the lost mother, the weird Taoist and his cave could not wholly suppress the spontaneity of youth and they spoke in half involuntary phrases of the beauty, the charm, the grandeur above and about them.

Lew-chee turned to their host. "How long have you sought this Elixir of Immortality?" he inquired.

"Many years," was the laconic reply.

"Why did you commence the search?" pursued Lew-chee.

There was a long pause, and Lew-chee repeated his question.

"Why do you inquire?" asked the Taoist.

"I, too, am a searcher after truth," replied the youth with candor. "I, too, would solve this riddle of existence."

The strange figure turned for a moment from the roots he had been sorting and gave the inquirer a searching look.

"Who would not seek freedom from such a demon-driven spot?" he muttered, then turned again to his task.

Lew-chee was not to be balked so lightly. "But how do you know you will ever find freedom?" he continued.

"The ancients found it. Others since have found it. Why should not I?" This again after a pause.

"You err!" exclaimed the youth. "No one has ever found it, or we should all know and be free today!"

The old man clambered to his feet with a surprising suddenness. He seized the iron-shod staff and advanced toward the youth, threateningly. Mae Jen uttered a little scream of terror and sprang to Lew-chee's side. The latter, who had been standing, made no attempt to retreat, but simply interposed his tall supple form before the girl. He looked full into the Taoist's eyes. A wild fierce light shone there which spoke of a soul on fire with anger or some strange ecstasy. Lew-chee was quick to recognize his mistake.

"A moment, a moment!" he interjected as his left hand went forth to guard a threatened blow. "I am but a youth. You, venerable sire, have searched long.

Pray save me, teach me. I vow to you, I, too, would know the truth of these things!"

The odd, old face again gazed long and searchingly. Then the fierceness died away with a muttered groan.

"Sit down," he commanded, and he, too, seated himself crosslegged on the bare floor of the cave.

"How dare you say, I err!" he began after a time, shaking his head mournfully. "There can be no error, or there is no hope left! None! None!"

Lew-chee wisely said nothing.

"Li of the Iron Staff found it," he continued after a time, speaking as though repeating to himself some great reassurance rather than seeking to convince others. "Li found it and by its power soared at times into the highest heavens to meet the Ancient Philosopher himself."

The Taoist paused, and swayed to and fro. Then he went on again: "The Old Pot Prince found it, hid in a gourd by night and healed thousands by day. Hwang, the Peaceful, found it and for forty years lived in the mountain caves, turning his flocks of sheep into white stones whenever danger threatened. Chang, the Fruitful, found it and on his magic mule rode thousands of miles each day, folding it up and hiding it in his wallet when he halted. Hsien, the thaumaturgist, found it. When wandering forth in the mountains in search of drugs, the fiercest beasts attended and guarded him. When the Emperor's lady mocked him he turned her instantly into a wrinkled old hag."

Again he paused a moment gazing intently at Mae Jen, then again continued his reverie: "She, the True Prince, found it transformed base metals into gold, healed impossible diseases, caused water to gush from the dry rocks and subdued all manner of noxious rep-

tiles. At length after one hundred and thirty-six years, he was caught up to heaven with all his family, even the dogs and the hens in the home sharing in the ascension."

He raised himself upon his knees and gazed upward as though piercing the massive mountain roof, remained for a moment as though in ecstasy, then sank slowly to the floor. A long silence followed as the strange figure swayed to and fro, murmuring something inaudible.

Lew-chee waited until the emotional tide had somewhat spent its force. Then he spoke slowly and deliberately.

"You teach well the traditions, sire, but who today will show us the elixir?" he asked. "Many have sought; who have found?"

A convulsive shudder shook the Taoist's frame. Fear shone from his eyes.

"Aye," he admitted hesitatingly, "even the great Emperor Wu of Han missed it though he drank daily the dew from his palace urn. . . . But he was too proud, haughty. . . . Yet Shu-yiu knew the way. When the great Emperor offered him the kingdom, he washed out his ears lest he should covet such honours, broke the gourd from which he drank, lest he be accustomed to luxury and henceforth lapped from his hands. Another hollow gourd that hung in a branch hard by his hut he also smashed lest the wind thereby make music soothing to his senses. He knew humility. . . . and purity. . . ."

"Some have succeeded, many by means of cinnabar," he continued, and a new hope breathed through his words. "Others have gained the goal by eating mother of pearl. Many have attained, many, by

means of powdered jade and a herb. There is abundant jade here in these mountains, and the herb . . . the herb . . . I have not found it yet, but I will, I will, . . . I will . . .”

Springing to his feet he seized again his iron staff and without further ado hurried from the cave.

Lew-chee arose and beckoning to Mae Jen, they followed him silently out. The Taoist was to be seen running rapidly, leaping from rock to rock, his long many coloured patchwork cloak flowing wildly out behind. Then he turned the corner of a crag and was lost to view.

The two fugitives turned involuntarily to the grandeur of Nature all about them. July, on the mountain top, was full of balmy breezes, the singing of wild birds, the bloom of innumerable flowers.

There was no returning to the cave with its weird decoctions. Mae Jen had never been in such majestic surroundings before and slowly led the way from one vantage point to another that she might the better take in all its vastness. She found at length a spot to her liking and dropped down coyly amid some bracken, commanding Lew-chee to a seat at her feet. From this lookout they could command the whole valley. Deep below the rapids roared and fretted and foamed, but only an occasional murmur reached this wild eyrie. Far up the river they saw at the foot of what seemed an almost sheer precipice, small rafts come to anchor for a time, then slowly approaching, descend the rapids. Like chips amid some charybdis, they tossed to and fro for a breathless half-hour, then came shooting forth into the less troubled waters far below.

For a time Mae Jen was entranced by the wonders about and above her. A succession of exclamations,

comments, questions came to her lips, and Lew-chee caught by her enthusiasm became her glad instructor, bringing forth treasures new and old from the fulness of his knowledge and admiration. Then the thought of her mother in distress came suddenly upon the girl as she realized that a certain whitewashed wall in the far distance marked the scene of their recent captivity. She sank into silence despite Lew-chee's attempts at reassurance, and the youth, catching her mood, drifted off into his own world of reverie.

His mind went back to the strange figure which had disappeared down the rocks so recently. What a life to be living: vows of dirt and poverty, huddling in caves, decocting and drinking strange lotions, hunting ever fruitlessly for a herb which ever evaded search. No wonder the unfortunate had become half lunatic, leering, loathsome. . . . And what was the basis of it all? Yes, there it was again, that endless desire of man to get rid of the curses of this existence . . . to find some means, magic or otherwise, by which he might shake off the drudgery, disease, dread disasters, death which surround him on every side . . . and there was no way out that way. . . . It only led to monstrosity, madness. . . . Tradition said some had attained to these magic powers, but who could verify such tales? . . . and even if it were so, the secret was now lost . . . lost and forever! . . .

Lew-chee came back from his reverie rather suddenly to find Mae Jen's large, lustrous eyes fixed fully upon him.

"Who are you?" she inquired quietly.

"Yes," he replied, catching her spirit of candor, "yes, I thought to tell you before, but there has been little opportunity. However, there is but little to tell.

I am a novice of the Spirit-Precipice Temple up the mountain slope above the Irrigation City. I was travelling to the capital to seek a long-lost sister, captured many years ago by the robbers, when I was taken in the same raid in which you were seized. You know the rest."

"No," she continued, still studying him. "I do not know. Why should you search us out in the uproar? Why run such risks for our sakes?"

"That I scarce know myself," he replied reflectively, "perhaps I acted on impulse, but it seemed impossible to leave you in danger."

"Confucius," he continued after a pause, "Confucius, urged that we be humane. He placed it first among his five great virtues. Then, too, the Buddha ever extolls mercy. He would save all life. How could I leave you to a fate such as my sister had suffered?"

Again he paused, then added naively, "I sat beside you as you wrote that letter in the courtyard. I had never seen anyone so beautiful before. How could I abandon you to these banditti? No, I could not. I will not."

Mae Jen lowered her eyes and with maidenly adroitness turned the thought. "My father will assuredly remember and reward you handsomely," she said.

"Reward?" he repeated, "Reward!" and he drew himself up as he sat with a stiffness that even surprised himself. "I, too, then am reckoned among the robbers!"

"Oh, no, no!" Mae Jen hastened to make amends. "How can you credit me with such thoughts? It is my turn to be indignant. Most deeply I apologize and thank you for your gallantry. I trust I may some day aid you in finding your sister. My father, I am sure,

will help us. So will our church people. They delight to do deeds of helpfulness."

"You are a Christian," he rejoined. "You see I do not need to inquire about your history. And you attend the Christian schools. I am not surprised at the latter as a few do so in my own city, though they do so largely because they are poor. That, of course, is not your motive. I have heard that their English and sciences are good. You probably attend for those. But you surely are not really a Christian. Of course few believe now the old stories of the foreigner stealing precious things from our soil which our dark eyes cannot see, but which their blue eyes see clearly, that they take children's eyes to make those small, dark pills they sell, or that they are about to slice up our land as one might a melon. But who can believe that we Chinese are all criminals because some patriarch of some race somewhere, sometime, ate an apple that he shouldn't? I heard one of their preachers declare with high heat that we would all burn eternally because their Adam was soft-eared enough to listen to his wife."

Lew-chee stopped to chuckle mildly and apparently expected Mae Jen to join. Before she could reply he continued, "I do not know much about wives, but from what I have read of the beautiful Yang Kwei-fay, our own provincial girls have a way even with Emperors, and from what I have seen of farmers' wives, they are not far behind. Perhaps that is the punishment that has fallen upon us," and he laughed full into her eyes.

But Mae Jen did not join. She did not relish having her faith distorted. Lew-chee noted it and became more serious. "Pardon, I fear I am wounding you,"

he hastened to add, "I have heard their doctrine but a few times. It seemed to me then, and as I thought it over afterwards, to be for the old and dying people who are about to leave this world and think only of the world to come. Even then our own hells are more horrible and our own heavens more alluring."

" 'In the midst of life, we are in death,' " quoted his companion. "Who can tell where you and I may be on the morrow. Youth passes as well as age. But you are wrong about Christianity being only for the aged. You must have heard a poorly informed advocate of our faith. Jesus was so busy with life he had little time to talk of death. His life was one of love and service and sacrifice. About Adam I know little. Our teachers are more concerned that we live Christ."

"Live Christ?" he repeated inquiringly. "What does that mean? Some special mystery of the sect, I suppose?"

"No," she replied. "Christianity teaches things I do not fully understand. Perhaps you would call them mysteries. But to live Christ is not one. It simply means living as Christ lived."

"And that means?"

"Why, that means," she continued, looking at him in half wonder at his persistence, "that means that we, as He, seek in various ways to heal and help men physically that they may be strong in body, to teach people that they may know truth, to exhort everyone to righteousness that they may attain fulness of life."

"Fulness of life!" he repeated. "Fulness of life! That is a fine phrase. I heard none of that in the Christian teaching in my native town. It was all of death and after death. Fulness of life! Yes, that expresses it well. Confucius spoke somewhat like

that. My Abbot dreamed it also when he was a youth. I have felt the wild longing within me, beating like a bird at its cage. But the Buddha found that was the very heart of humanity's delusion. Confucius tried it and after two thousand years, what suffering! What poverty! What ignorance! What beasts men have become!"

He paused again meditatively, then turning toward the maiden he bent forward, all eagerness, and said:

"Think you that where Confucius and the Buddha have failed, your Christ can succeed in showing the Way?"

"I am not a philosopher, as you seem to be," she replied seriously, "but I love to read history, world history. In that I find that Confucius and Christ lived but a few hundred years apart, Confucius being the elder. In China we have largely followed him, and you have just painted a picture of what we are today, a land much now as Confucius found it in his day. In contrast I read the history of England and America which has sprung from her. In the days when our sages walked upon earth, these peoples were unknown barbarians. Today they are the leaders of the civilization of the world. They say Christianity is the secret of their progress. Can Christ not do the same for China?"

"I am ignorant," he answered gravely. "I have read no history but our own. But teach me. I, too, would read the world's records. The Buddha said that a thousand years after his departure another, Maitreya, the Merciful, 'The Laughing Buddha,' would come. Can it be your Christ is he?"

"Yes, teach me more," he continued eagerly. "See, I have no lotus leaves with which to do it, but with

these ferns I crown you as my goddess," and weaving the fronds deftly into a garland, he placed it gently upon her jet-black hair.

"Ah, yes, the lilies too," he added as he noted a bunch of great white flowers nodding near by. "They, like the lotus, mean purity. They will complete my worship, then I will sit at your feet and learn wisdom."

He rose as he spoke, but his hands never reached the lilies. A shot rang out and something sang overhead. At the same instant a form broke from the rocks in the direction of the cave. Lew-chee quickly seized his rifle. But another glance showed him it was the Taoist priest running toward him. Was it he who had fired? Impossible! He had no weapon, and another look showed the terror written on his countenance.

"They come!" he cried. "They come! Run! Run!"

Lew-chee turned quickly as another sound broke upon his ears. It was the baying of dogs. Ah, he had not calculated upon that. The bandits then had crossed the stream and were using dogs to run them down. There was no time to be lost. Mae Jen was already upon her feet and crouching low they spontaneously followed the Taoist up the ascent. But whither? Like a flash it came to Lew-chee that only the grim precipice they had surveyed from their eyrie lay in that direction. Yet the priest ran that way and he might know a path. Any other plan was certain capture. The priest ran wildly. But a few minutes and he was out of sight. Then he appeared higher up for a moment and beckoned them. Mae Jen made a heroic effort to keep the priest in view but he was again soon out of sight. A few minutes more and they

came suddenly to the edge of the precipice. For hundreds of feet it fell straight, sheer. They drew back with a shudder. But there could be no hesitation. The dogs were baying madly just over the crest and would be upon them in a moment. Grasping his rifle with one hand and Mae Jen's hand with the other, Lew-chee ran a few paces to the left, then fell upon his breast in a thicket of bracken protected by a small scrub oak. Mae Jen lay prone by his side. The end had probably come.

"Do not move, or make any sound," he whispered. "If need be I will defend you to the last."

There was no time for further speech. Suddenly the hounds burst over the hill and Lew-chee made ready to fire. Then a strange sight met his astounded gaze. Suddenly the priest sprang from some unnoticed nook and ran right in front of the two dogs, his long gown flowing out behind, his great hat inverted like some wind-blown cone, his dishevelled hair streaming in the breeze. With a howl of triumph the dogs seized his garments and attempted to haul him down. With a curdling yell, half of terror, half of triumph, the Taoist reached the verge of the abyss and with a wild leap that dragged dogs and debris with him, disappeared into the fathomless depths below.

IX

THE PRECIPICE

MAE JEN involuntarily clutched Lew-chee's arm. He bent over and touched her dark hair with his lips. "Some God or Buddha has saved us for the moment," he whispered. "But the human hounds are not far behind."

"With God all things are possible," she murmured.

"Life is sweet, though purchased with much suffering! They might spare yours. Had you not best surrender?" he suggested.

"No, never, never! I will wed the priest's precipice first," and reaching out her hand as she lay, she touched its verge as though ready for the final ordeal.

"Then we die together," he said soberly. "Ten minutes' time at most and we will have started,—whither?"

"The Christ has said that in His Father's house there are many mansions," half repeated the maiden.

"Yes," replied the youth reflectively, "and the Buddha has promised his Western Paradise and the Taoists their genii isles, but who knows whither?"

"But we can trust the Father," she faltered.

"True," he answered slowly, "true, then we fare forth together, and forever."

He did not complete the sentence. Excited voices were heard as five men heavily armed with double bandoliers of cartridges, rifles and bayonets burst over the hillcrest. The leader, a big bullet-headed fellow,

gesticulating wildly with his free arm, was talking in broken sentences punctuated by gasps for breath.

"Saw them run this way, . . . fellow and girl first, . . . then the crazy one. . . . Where are the dogs? —Stop!—stop!—Curses on their ancestors. . . . They've gone over the edge . . . and I nearly went too. . . . Curse their mothers. . . . Curse their ancestors. . . . Ten thousand curses. . . ."

The others had come up now and all stood breathing hard along the verge of the abyss. One or two got down and began to scan the depths, lying at full length with heads well extended.

"There's a hat there. It's the crazy one's," reported one.

"And the tan dog's dead farther down," reported the second.

"No sign of the others. But they must be there, curse them," corroborated the leader. "They must have leaped farther out. . . . But we'll have them," and he rose to give his orders.

"We must get down the cliff and get the girl's duds," he ejaculated angrily. "Come," and he started straight for the small oak where the fugitives lay hidden.

Lew-chee pressed the trigger of his gun. The hour had struck. It was life for life and if that failed, the precipice.

"Stop," called one of the band. "That is not the way. We go to the right to get down!"

Again the leader with a cruel oath stopped and turned.

"Show the way then," he growled in a deep guttural voice. "But wait," he added. "Three will remain here on guard. The guide and I will go below,"

and turning to the right the leader and guide crept down the face of the precipice.

The three remaining brigands stretched themselves out on the rocks but a few yards distant from the scrub oak and its two throbbing-hearted fugitives. Neither dared to even whisper, but their eyes met in strange wonderment. On what a slender thread life seemed to hang. Death beckoned yet waited haltingly. Time and eternity seemed to sway to and fro as swung a pendulum. Here they were still alive and unharmed yet with death sitting undecided a few yards away. A few steps of one of the now resting robbers or a slight sound from one of their own motionless bodies and again death would rush forward. Then who could foretell what would happen when the leader returned and reported that only the frenzied priest had been found?

Lew-chee's mind teemed with subtle suggestions. Crawl away, but where? Fire a shot and fight it out? But that would come in due time. Wait till the chief returned and risk it? But the risk was almost certain detection! No path seemed clear. He could only wait, and, as Mae Jen had said, trust some greater Power.

As they waited, one of the robbers arose, and began to stretch himself. He said something to his companions and they sat up, then also got to their feet.

"Who knows?" they heard the first say. "The old idiot might have silver hidden away in his hovel. Some say they know how to turn things into silver."

"So," agreed a second. "They'll not be back for an hour. Let's go and see," and they lumbered off over the crest, leaving the guns of their chief and the guide hidden behind a boulder.

Lew-chee sprang to his feet and almost dragged his companion across the opening to where the chief and the guide had disappeared. It was a bold venture, but he had made his decision. They might evade them on the way, or if there was to be a fight, then he had the advantage, his gun against their side-arms. He clambered quickly from spot to spot looking ever for signs of the descending robber pair. Mae Jen followed rapidly. Her gymnasium work at school with ladders, bars and poles had been good training, and now served her in good stead. There was no path, but they skirted the precipice as rapidly as they could, halting ever to avoid detection and danger.

For half an hour they clambered, now to right, now to left, zigzagging slowly but steadily down. Suddenly Mae Jen clutched her companion's arm. "Look!" she cried. Lew-chee looked in the direction the girl indicated and there on a shelving rock, two hundred feet below, the two robbers could be seen bent in an endeavour to secure something from the depths below.

The fugitives paused for a moment to get their bearings, then endeavoured to swing farther to the right. But the ravine they were following had its limits and they soon found themselves winding toward their enemy. They thought to go back, but that would mean to play themselves between the two bands. So they crept slowly down, hoping ever to find a spot where they might secure shelter, if not safe hiding. The slope held few such vantage grounds. Coming round a turn in the cliff, they drew back aghast to find they were within fifty feet of the robbers.

Again Lew-chee acted with sudden audacity. He felt there was little danger that the three above would have so soon returned, so whispering to his companion

to hug close the wall, he ran forward at full speed. He was on the bandits before they were aware of his presence. Intent on securing the pouch of the badly mangled priest, they were lying outstretched over a low ledge which stopped further progress. They awoke with a start to find Lew-chee's foot on the neck of the guide and his gun firmly planted at the ear of the chief.

"A word and you die, you dogs!" he hissed.

The chief attempted to turn his head, but the rifle barrel awed him into inactivity.

"Unloose their ankle-bands," he called to Mae Jen, who had followed fast, "and bind their feet tightly."

Mae Jen's deft fingers worked willingly and quickly. In a few minutes the robbers were securely bound and each had a large stone in his mouth to ensure against shouting an alarm. The fugitives were about to pass on, but again Lew-chee bethought himself, and unloosening the footbands of the chief started him down the slope before them.

"Tell your friends when they come that their chief may be found further down the glen. Whether dead or alive will depend on his and your conduct," he added to the guide as they departed. "As for us, five lives to two will be the least exchange."

An hour later they left the chief well bound, with an ugly chasm yawning close at hand should he be over-active in efforts toward freedom. The search would keep their pursuers busy for that day, now that the dogs were gone. At least so Lew-chee reasoned, and they pushed hurriedly on and down.

All the afternoon they climbed, avoiding ever a view from the crest of the mountain. Evening came, then twilight, but still they paused not. They must

reach the river if possible by dusk, for travel upon such a slope by night would be suicidal. The long, dark shadows were fast closing in when they came suddenly to a gorge cut by a small stream which fed the rushing river beyond. Fortunately it had not rained for some days, so the bed was almost dry, but the banks went down a sheer twenty feet then shelved off almost precipitously for another fifty below.

They walked carefully along the course for a distance, hoping to find some spot accessible for descent, but everywhere the prospect was the same. Their only help seemed to come from a clump of bamboos which at one spot overhung the ravine. With the old temple chopper which still dangled at his waist, Lew-chee cut down one of these and held it tightly while Mae Jen slid down the twenty feet of precipice and made a temporary footing of the slope below. Then Lew-chee himself endeavoured to make the descent by half detaching one of the bamboos and bending it over the ledge. Alas! He had scarce begun the descent when his weight tore the whole clump from its slender grip in the soil and down he came, trees, roots, rocks and all within a span of where Mae Jen stood. Like a flash she, too, was swept away by the rocks, and soon all were rushing, a tangled mass, down the steep slope to the river.

It was over in what seemed but a few fleeting seconds, and Lew-chee, half dazed, slowly extricated himself from the debris about him. Then he thought of his companion. He glanced about in the darkness, but could not see her.

"Little sister, little sister!" he called.

There was no reply. Only the little stream at his feet rippled a sleepy response. He groped about

wildly, ever calling pleadingly as he went. He rushed into the stream and waded about, fearing that she had been swept therein and might even now be dead, drowned in its cool yet cruel waters. Still there was no trace of her. Then he began to clamber slowly up the steep embankment, groping eagerly for any clue as to the way he had come. For hours he searched frantically but in vain. At last, after what seemed to him an age of agony, he found her. She was covered with debris and wedged in tightly against a great rock that blocked the pathway.

At first he thought her dead for his voice brought no response. But breath was still there, and he dug away the rubble in frenzied haste. Quickly he carried her to the stream and bathed her hands and face. She sighed at the refreshing touch, but made no further response. For an hour he sat by the bank of the stream, her head resting upon his knees, bathing her face, stroking her slender hands, praying to all the gods and Buddhas, saints and departed loved ones he had ever known. Human help there was none. There must surely be some higher power at such times of crisis, or what did this cry of the human heart mean? He thought of a thousand possible plans, but all seemed impracticable. There was but one that might work. It was the seizure of a raft and shooting the rapids by moonlight. Yet that was an unheard-of thing. Even in daylight only the sturdiest dared venture, and then there were many wrecks. But this was a time for hazards. Mae Jen could no longer travel. He could not carry or conceal her for long. The morning would again bring dogs and demons hounding, haunting their pathway. He made a bed of the bamboo leaves for his little charge, laid her down tenderly, and

having again discovered his gun crept slowly down the valley toward the main stream and the spot where the rafts were usually at anchor.

That night was a long succession of struggles. The road was rough and difficult even to his accustomed feet in the darkness. Fortunately he found three rafts anchored at the little bend in the river, but each had a dog, and these yelped and howled frantically as he approached. Then he returned for his charge and carried her with great effort over the long, tedious track. Again he must face the howling of the dogs, but to find that the rafts, fearing danger, had pushed out a distance from the shore. Long again he waited until the barking died away. Then seizing his precious bundle in his arms he waded boldly out into the stream, approaching step by step warily, wearily, then placed her on the stern of the raft highest upstream. The men and dogs on the fore part of the craft slept heavily and he, too, lay down exhausted. Sleep struggled to master him, but he did not dare lose consciousness. He was waiting for the moonlight.

At the first glint over the far towering mountain tops he was on his feet and ready for action. Seizing his gun, he crept forward to the front of the raft and unloosened the anchor rope. A dog made at him with a savage growl. Then the men, three in number, sprang to their feet and began to shout. He brandished his gun in the growing light and ordered silence. But the men on the adjoining craft were also aroused and began to grapple the one which was slowly being dragged by its stern into the current. With a swift stroke from his rifle he knocked the pole from their hands and ordered his own men to work. "Get into midstream," he said sternly.

"But to face the rapids means certain death," they pleaded.

Lew-chee was inexorable. "Get into midstream," he repeated. He kicked the yelping cur into the water and prodded his men into action. Sullenly they obeyed. Then making his way to the rear of the raft, he carried his precious charge to the center of the craft and covered her with the raftsmen's quilts and matting.

In a few minutes the raft was swaying up and down uneasily in midstream. Now that his commands were obeyed, Lew-chee studied his men.

"You have nothing to fear from me," he assured them. "I am on an important mission for a great man and it requires haste and hazard. If you carry your raft through safely beyond the series of rapids I will release you. Even a reward may be yours. But there must be no clumsiness, no cowardice. The first man who falters will decide his own fate." Accustomed to brigand rule, the men made no reply but each stood to his post, pike in hand.

The raft could be seen now in the clear moonlight gliding swiftly down the smooth stretch that ever narrowed as they neared the rapids. A moment more and they were in them. The big logs rolled and twisted like a serpent. The spray dashed over them as they swept from side to side drenching workers and fugitives like summer showers. The men shouted but stood firm. At times the great writhing thing seemed to be headed straight for some jutting rock where waters gnashed and roared in fiendish rage. Then a swift touch from the man at the prow turned them aside and they swept downward in dire dismay at the danger. At times they turned and twisted so suddenly that it seemed the long body must be torn asunder, but

again the long pole in the center shot forth quickly, accurately, or the rude rudder at the rear gave a sudden sweep and all raced forward furiously, frantically, yet free of danger.

Thus moments became minutes and the minutes hours. Narrow gorges at times broadened into half-placid lagoons, to narrow again into maniacal turmoil. Villages swept suddenly upstream to be followed by narrow gorges where the sheer sides showed no sign of life, or broadened out into shallows where the deeper lying logs scraped over the pebbly bottom. Moonlight slowly turned to dawn and dawn to broad daylight as they raced madly on.

The little heaped-up bundle in the centre of the raft had not stirred. Strange throbs of pain shot ever and anon through Lew-chee's thoughts as he glanced thither in the midst of present perils. Was she still unconscious, he wondered. What were her injuries? Would she survive till they had reached freedom? He prayed hard for her preservation, and a wild sense of what her loss would mean tugged hard at his heart-strings. Yet his hopes rose as the hours sped. A few more miles of river now and they should be beyond the robbers' borders. Then he would find a way somehow to hurry her to the great capital. There, also, he knew the foreigners had a hospital and that gave him great hope. For many years the countryside had rung with the news of their marvellous cures. The lame were made to walk, the blind to see, and old, incurable diseases in many a case answered to their magic medicine.

Thus musing Lew-chee noted the progress of the raft, as a small rapid passed, it slowly made its way out through fleck and foam into a calm stretch of the

stream. The men began to pole, and he lay down, wearily feeling that the end was near. A little further on was a small town and from there he would take his charge. The summer sun was now high and its warmth and light spread forth with sparkle and strength upon the scene. He had dozed away, he knew not how long, when he was suddenly aroused by shouting close at hand. The raft was drifting almost to the bank. A dozen men in soldiers' uniforms were demanding that it stop and they get aboard.

Lew-chee was on his feet in an instant, and instinctively his gun went to his shoulder. Like a flash half-a-dozen of the soldiers in turn covered him with their weapons.

"Hold!" cried an officer, and a parley began.

"Who are you?" asked Lew-chee.

"We are some of General Chang's men, out on a special mission, and are returning to a larger body stationed at the nearest town." Lew-chee's heart beat high at the welcome news.

A little later and they were aboard the raft and drifting down to safety. On further inquiry, Lew-chee learned that General Chang himself was absent from the capital, having been called to the east by political troubles there. He had not been home when the word arrived of the capture of his wife and daughter, but had detached a trusted captain with a hundred men feeling that they should be able to effect a release through negotiation or military action.

"So far our efforts have been discouraging," the leader of the soldiers said. "We have received a letter offering to negotiate, but later it was learned that the old-line robbers had overpowered the more approachable party and having killed the leaders refused any-

thing but an enormous ransom. Further rumor has it that the captives have escaped, but no one knows any details or even if the report be true, or only a ruse. Have you heard anything of the affair?" he asked Lew-chee.

Then Lew-chee told his story to their astonished ears, ending his almost incredible news by stating that their general's daughter was now lying on the raft, under the quilts and matting. Even the raftsmen looked incredible at this assertion. Slowly rising, he led the officer to the spot and uncovered the little, motionless figure. She was still unconscious, and Lew-chee noticed what he had not seen before—a deeply swollen scar across her forehead and temple. "That was the cause then," he murmured. "She must have struck the rock when she fell."

The rough soldiers were at once all courtesy and attention. They dipped water from the stream to bathe the wound. They offered Lew-chee some of their improvised food, big scones which they carried as emergency rations. Half-a-dozen of them took turns aiding the raftsmen in poling the raft forward through the shallower waters. They even took up a collection through their officer and bestowed it upon the sailors for their extra labour during the night. Lew-chee's heart leaped in silent joy at these new touches of kindness, yet grieved that the little sister who had so shared his perils could not now share his freedom.

An hour later and they had reached the small town. The word ran quickly to the captain and he in turn arrived speedily to render assistance, naturally full of rejoicing that their General's daughter had been rescued and urgent that she go forward with speed to the foreign hospital. Lew-chee came in again for a

full share of courtesy and much praise for his skill and courage.

"You are a brave young man," said the captain heartily.

"I have only done what any other human being who calls himself a man would have done," replied Lew-chee quietly.

He was refreshed by abundance of good food, given some sorely-needed clean clothing and urged to accept a chair for the remainder of the journey. Another chair was arranged for their General's daughter, together with all the comforts that their camp could provide in the way of thick wadded quilts, and soon they were on their way to the great capital.

A small guard of soldiers relieved Lew-chee of further responsibility, so he settled back in his chair to rest. It was a new experience for him, such luxury as a sedan-chair being almost unknown in his rough hill-region. Soon answering to the gentle swaying up and down, he sank to sleep, oblivious to the changing shoulders, the many starts and stops, the traffic of the roads, and the jostling and shouting of the many small villages through which they passed.

An unusual animation of voices roused him at length from his slumbers. Looking forth through his chair windows, he noticed that he was about to cross a great stone bridge. It was the famous south bridge of the capital and all was animation. Hawkers were crying their wares, chairs were passing and repassing, shouting to each other and to the dense crowd to clear the way, carriers with poles upon their shoulders were struggling bravely to free themselves from the entangling throng, coolies, runners, soldiers, civilians were pushing, elbowing, jostling and being jostled in

endless streams to and fro. Slowly his own chair found its way through and another turn brought him within view of the great wall and gates of the city. The former towering thirty to forty feet on high, and continually notched and pierced with loopholes seemed to him impregnable. The latter with its great towers above, its double walls and ironclad gates seemed even more impossible for an enemy. Now, however, the latter were wide open and through them ebbed and flowed water, wood and rice, vegetables, fruits, tobacco, cloth, straw, brick and tiles, men, cows, mules and horses, great red bridal chairs and black coffins, anything, everything for men, dead or alive, among a population of half a million.

To add to the confusion, soldiers and customs officers guarded the gates, stopping all manners of conveyances for search or suspicion. But Lew-chee's chair, supplied as it was with its guard, had little trouble and soon found entrance. In the city again all was energy. Street followed street, hat streets, bone streets, copper streets, silk streets, narrow streets, wide streets, but everywhere the same congestion and shouting. He looked out eagerly to see if Mae Jen's chair were in sight. He could not discover it.

"Where is the chair of the lady who accompanied me?" he inquired of his chairmen and guards.

"It is slightly in advance of you," he was told. But it was not until he had compassed an hour's tortuous travel through the city that he found it. The carriers had placed it down at the entrance of a high building of Western architecture such as Lew-chee had not seen before. He readily surmised it was the hospital.

"Set my chair down," he said to his men and hurried to render assistance to Mae Jen.

Reaching the chair, he could ill conceal his alarm. Mae Jen seemed flushed and fevered and was talking aimlessly. Almost immediately the call to enter the hospital came, and the chair was carried through large, lacquered gates, into a big open courtyard astonishingly clean and orderly. Two girls in white, whom Lew-chee later learned were nurses, approached. A few moments more and a litter was on hand and his little charge was carried quietly and tenderly away.

"May I follow?" he asked a bystander who was one of the servants.

"No," he was told politely but firmly. "This is a women's hospital and only women or well-accredited relatives can be admitted."

Guard, chairmen and everyone else were requested to retire to the outer gate, and Lew-chee could do no other than follow.

X

A CLUE

LEW-CHEE tried to enter into conversation with the gateman, requesting that he find out from day to day how it fared with the patient, and that he would come for information. The latter proved, however, to be a rather stupid and grasping old fellow and Lew-chee received but scant satisfaction. Like many of his class he evidently expected consideration for his favours. The guards were otherwise. They had instructions from their captain to find for Lew-chee some suitable quarters in the city and were solicitous that he, after a few days delay, lend his aid to securing the release of the mother. To this project Lew-chee readily assented. He also assured them that he had formerly carried introductions from his home to the abbot of the well-known Literary Temple. He only asked, therefore, their kindness to accompany him thither. This they readily did, and departed after mutual congratulations and offers of good will. The abbot and his priests, too, having established Lew-chee's identity and learning of his many misfortunes received him most cordially. Thus he found food, friends and little courtesies on all sides.

That evening after the usual prayers and sutras had been intoned and recited, the abbot drew him aside and they talked far into the night. The older man listened sympathetically to the youth's story of recent days and praised his courage and kindliness. Thus

encouraged, Lew-chee went on to tell him of his earlier life, his mother's and father's death, and the loss of the sister of his childhood. He traced the years of torment under The Tiger, his later growth under the kindly indulgence of the little Hunchback, the lame school-master and his aged abbot. Finally he told of his visit to the Iron Idol and his finding of the scrap of paper, which told of his sister's sale to a man in Chengtu, one Wong, "the Pacifier."

"My great longing now," he concluded, "is to search out and save my sister. Can you, gracious abbot, aid me in my search?"

The abbot, who was a man of tender heart, was deeply touched by the evident sincerity and noble spirit of the youth before him.

"It is no easy task," he said gravely, "to search out one man among half a million, especially a man who lived in the great city ten years ago. He possibly has an assumed name, and has every reason to keep his identity hidden. Still, through my priests who touch life at many points through funerals, festivals and processions, and through the street elders who, in the main, know all the families on their streets, and also through the yamen runners who are in touch with all forms of villainy, much might be done. Such efforts shall certainly be encouraged. I will assuredly exert myself in your behalf until the search prove useless."

Greatly reassured, Lew-chee slept happily that night. Even his fears for Mae Jen were greatly assuaged. She was now safe in the foreign hospital and they could work miracles. Next day and for some days following, he continued in this happy mood. He went daily with temple priests to call upon some street elder in all possible parts of the city. The yamens,

too, were visited and runners interested in the affair. He met his guard frequently, gave them what information he could as to the captured mother, and asked only a few days longer of respite before he joined them in their more determined search. He also went daily to the hospital and endeavoured to solicit information from the surly gateman. Lew-chee had but little money at his disposal—only a few cash given him by the kindly priests—so could secure but little satisfaction. The first day he had bribed as liberally as possible, and the response he got after much haggling was that Mae Jen was seriously ill with brain fever, and in delirium. Succeeding days brought little solace, but he knew that at least the girl still lived and that implied hope.

One day the search for his lost sister suddenly grew high with expectation. The street-elder in a well-known residential section recalled a big compound which ten years before had obtained an unenviable reputation as being the wretched assembling place for young girls who had been bought or stolen. Landlords were then sought out, their rent rolls canvassed and their records obtained. Several names appeared as tenants, this doubtless to give appearance of being rented by a number of families, but one alone possessed interest for them. It was that of Wong, "the Pacifier." At length they located an old night watchman whose duty it was to beat the gong from hour to hour upon the street. He, too, could recall some facts for much of their nefarious work had been conducted by night. The results made a few things clear. Wong and his gang had been comparatively young men, they were working apparently in collusion with robber bands in the country, and further claimed themselves

to be soldiers, officers. They had left suddenly, with two boat loads of their sad plunder down the long river, presumably for Shanghai, and had been heard of no more. Who in that respectable neighbourhood wished to inquire further of such rascality? They carried their inquiry next to the boat hangers at the great wharf of the city, but there made no progress. Daily scores of small boats came and went. Among them were all classes and conditions of men, women and children. Who could tell what relations existed. Often the most wicked seemed most lavish in wealth, goodwill and courtesy.

Lew-chee returned to the temple that night much depressed. Even the kindly companions about him could give little comfort. His sister had been sold still farther afield, far down the great winding Yangtse. Who could now trace her among the countless millions of the great cities which lined its tortuous course to the sea? Yes, she was gone. Even the kindly abbot admitted that. There was no use searching further. He would report to the guard tomorrow, and go with them in search of the lost mother. That at least was worth doing.

Early next morning he hurried to the hospital gate to get tidings of Mae Jen. He had been absent for two days and hoped that there might be a turn for the better. He was startled when the old gateman greeted him with a sickly grin and without waiting inquiry informed him that she was gone.

"Gone?" cried the youth distractedly. "Gone, where?"

"Gone to the heavens," the old wretch chuckled. "She's dead! They carried her out yesterday."

"But where have they taken her?" he persisted, horror-stricken.

"Taken her? How do I know? Is that my affair?" bawled the old man striking an attitude for a wrangle. "Why do you come around here making trouble for anyway? What is she to you?" And he began to revile him vociferously.

Lew-chee knew his countrymen, knew also that he was at a disadvantage, and backed sadly away, the old man reviling him continuously as he retreated. A little later he returned, however, to inquire of some of the shopkeepers near by whether a coffin had been carried forth the preceding day. Alas, they confirmed the gateman's story.

Poor Lew-chee! It was a day of utter dejection. Yesterday had been the disillusionment of his long-cherished dream of at length finding some clue to his long-lost sister. But he had had consolation that at least one little sister still remained—Mae Jen. Now the dire truth had come. She, too, was dead. What was left to live for? She had awakened a strange new hope within him, a faith that her Christ might be right, that this world might be made great and good and glad. He recalled again her phrase about "fulness of life." It seemed believable as they had sat together upon the mountain top with the flowers, the birds, the balmy breezes all about them, the mighty rocks above, the deep-rushing stream far below, and she, so young, so fair, so true, so thoughtful, glowing, breathing, smiling by his side. Alas! Alas! He had never dared acknowledge it before. He acknowledged it now. He had loved her. Even the thought had not dared to form itself in life. She was so far above him in education, in station, in soul-

purity. Now she was gone, he might whisper it to his own soul. Yes. He had loved her! He had loved her!

He wandered about the streets, he knew not how long nor whither, murmuring to himself, muttering to the crowds about him till they turned to stare at him as he passed, meditating, ever meditating—well-nigh mad with meditation.

What could it all mean, this meeting with one so fair? For the passing moment it seemed a foretaste of what the world might indeed become. Yes, that was the surface valuation. But beneath, the soul of the thing as now it had ended, so bitterly ended? What but proof that the Buddha again was right. All things of the eye and sense, were but deception leading some time to disillusionment. Even love was but a lust and a lie! Confucius and the Christ had been enamoured by the outer appearance of things. The Buddha had traced all things to their fruits in delusion and their roots in desire. He assuredly was the true teacher of life's riddle.

"I will give up this struggle," mused Lew-chee, "and go back to the mountain-temple and tell the old abbot I have seen the first steps toward enlightenment. I will take the vows of the priesthood and seek the way of Nirvana and perpetual peace."

In the course of his wanderings he approached the great east gate of the city, and his attention was arrested by a commotion near at hand. Some men in soldier's clothes had seized a hawker of vegetables and were handling him roughly. The man was protesting vigorously but to no avail. He was dragged off, his load left to its fate. Then an empty sedan-chair was stopped and its carriers seized. The people of the street hurried past, no one daring to utter a word of

protest. Half-dazed, Lew-chee slowed his pace to see what would happen next. To his amazement one of the soldiers suddenly seized him also. He protested, and even made an attempt at resistance.

"Why am I being arrested?" he asked in his astonishment. A volley of curses and blows came for answer, and two more soldiers fell upon him. Badly beaten and bruised, he was dragged to his feet and a rope which held others thrust through the sleeves of his coat and about his body. Then the strange procession moved on. Farther down the street he ventured to ask one of his fellow-prisoners what it all meant. The answer came laconically in two words—"Seizing carriers."

As the grim procession wound its way along the street, others were constantly seized—luckless farmers, apprentices, coolies, carpenters, anyone who could be expected to carry a load for the outgoing streams of soldiery. Then they zigzagged their way through the great east gate, down some side-streets to a dilapidated temple, where they were jostled and jammed, an indiscriminate mass, into a big, dirty room. Guards were placed at the doors, the ropes which strung them together removed, and they were free to adjust themselves as best they could. A few fortunates had friends on the outside who by way of ready cash or right relations with the men higher up, secured their freedom, but for the majority there was no alternative but to sit or lie upon the bare, smelly floor, cowed and stoical.

Night came on slowly with no bedding, no food, no drink, and together with the others Lew-chee stretched himself out as best he could upon the dank mud floor. As usual, mosquitoes, fleas and other insects swarmed

about him, but these were as nothing compared to the sting of anguish within his soul. Indeed, in the depth of the night, with the oppression and noxious odours all about him, he would even have welcomed death. All life was oppression. The officials oppressed the soldiers, the soldiers oppressed the people, the demon Desire oppressed all. Lucky little sister who had so soon and so suddenly left it all. Ah, to die and go with her! Fortunate the frenzied Taoist who had entered eternity at one fell leap. Alas, that he had not followed him over the verge. Surely not the gods, but some tantalizing, grinning demon had saved him from the robbers, the river, the ravines! Yes, verily, life, love, longings, all were lies. Death alone was freedom. Welcome death!

Thus the long night passed. Well before dawn the prisoners were roused and driven forth into the dirty courtyard. Here a bowl of gruel was served to such as could eat it, after which they were hustled out and down other streets to the soldiers' camp. These, too, were up and great masses of baggage lay about. As the carriers came in they were instantly seized by soldier groups eager that their luggage go forward. Lew-chee found himself the center of a half-dozen soldiers themselves loaded down with guns, cartridges and endless accoutrement, and eager that their quilts, boxes of small belongings and other utensils should go with them. In a trice he was being loaded to the ground. Some realized the situation and rushed for other carriers, but none were to be had. Then they returned to wrangle among themselves and by means of kicks, cuffs and much reviling, to force Lew-chee to carry twice or thrice an ordinary human load. Fortunately, he was no novice to such labour. He had climbed the

hills many a time with burdens which would have broken the back of the uninitiated. But that was some years ago and he was now weak from recent experiences. Still he bore up stoically with his final allotment, and after much shouting, swearing and confusion the procession started. But whither?

Lew-chee did not know. Those about him, with whom he dared exchange a word or two, seemed equally ignorant.

"These soldiers," said one, who appeared to gauge the situation better than the rest, "belong to Colonel Wong's command. No doubt we are bound for the east."

This view of the case seemed sufficient for the mass of the prisoners. One and all, they were simply cattle under the lash of some invisible cowherd, going forward to an unknown shambles. The soldiers fell in two by two and marched along the narrow streets to the weird music of horn and drum. The carriers staggered along behind, each guarded by a soldier. Pack-mules and barrows, laden with small field-guns and ammunition filed along at the rear. A few chairs bearing higher officers and their mounted guards came last. Someone, somewhere had balanced a few pros and cons and decided what must be. These were the pawns in the game to be played against other pawns equally innocent and ignorant as to what it all signified. Lew-chee was the lowest of all, a mere beast of burden, necessary for the moment but entirely negligible should his strength fail and he fall by the roadside. No one in the long procession as it wound forth through city streets and then out into the dusty country roads that morning, realized this more than the mountain lad with the great heap of baggage upon his

back. Overhead the morning sun shone forth with rays of clearest gold, on all sides the rice-fields waved their deepest rustling green, while along the road, in the midst of all this loveliness, trudged nature's highest handiwork bent on destruction and death! Someone's desire was doing it!

"Why should the ambitions of one thus tie souls of thousands?" thought Lew-chee. "Who could answer that? I cannot." The youth sighed, sweltered, and staggered on.

XI

MADAME CHANG'S "FUNERAL"

MEANWHILE, far off in the valley of the great mountains, Madame Chang was playing her part among the primitive phenomena and people about her. Hidden in her nook of the rock she had heard the band that came running down to the crossing but a few minutes after Lew-chee and her daughter had swung out on the great cable. They could not be readily seen in the darkness, but she judged from their voices that they must be eight or ten in number. There had been little hesitation. One or two had apparently listened to such sounds as the cable might give, and announcing that the fugitives were still crossing, a couple had been sent in advance to effect the capture, all to follow speedily. Thus when Lew-chee had cut the great hawser, two were apparently far out on the course and two others were following fast. The sudden severing had caused great consternation. Immediately those still on shore had run hurriedly down the bank to aid in hauling in the great hawser. How many were saved or lost she never knew. To her it was a heaven-sent opportunity for flight and she had sped up the stream as rapidly as she could in the darkness.

How far she travelled she did not know. Tortured in soul as to the fate of her child, she stumbled on recklessly. She could only believe that the rope had broken by the unusual strain and that the fugitives

had plunged to a sudden struggle and ultimate death. Even if that were so it were better than capture, and she plunged deeper into the darkness. After a time the moon came suddenly out, leaping the mountain crests and sprinkling all with its bewitching splendour. She could now see more clearly, but realized that she must also proceed more cautiously as voices still called and little bands appeared unexpectedly from hidden homes and gulches. Ere long she reached the limit of the corn-fields and felt a new freedom as she entered the forest. But there was still no halting and she traveled on and on and ever upward into the night.

Some time in the early morning as the moon began to wane over the adjoining peaks she came against a sheer rise in the rocks and sat down exhausted. But though she felt unable to rise, sleep was far distant. She was too deeply stirred by her own and her daughter's danger for that.

"Is it possible that my daughter still lives?" she said to herself. "Will the robbers find other spots to cross the river after her? And who, after all, is this youth to whom we entrusted our lives?"

Were they even now happy in death? She almost prayed that they might be so. Then, despite her weariness, she knelt and committed all to the great Father who slumbereth not nor blundereth.

The day dawned at length and she found her way around the rock. For an hour or more she again clambered upward, hoping that, in some way, she might scale the great summit before her and descend into a more secluded valley beyond. A rude path seemed to lead the way for a time, and, wearied in mind and body, she followed it. Suddenly, to her surprise, she met a woman bearing a great bundle of brushwood upon her

back. There was no escape. They had met fully face to face and the path was narrow, almost impassable, through trees and boulders.

A glance showed the burden-bearer to be an elderly woman. Her uncovered gray, dishevelled hair told that. She was also obviously long inured to toil. Her large, bare feet, her meagre, sadly patched blue cotton clothing and deeply bronzed skin testified to that. But it was a kindly soul withal that peered out wistfully through smoke-swollen eyes and deeply furrowed brow and face. A word of kindness would at least harm neither, so the general's wife uttered it.

"You are up early," she ventured in polite phrase.

"Not early," answered the elder woman, and continuing according to custom said: "Where is the lady going?"

"Just rambling," came the stereotyped rejoinder. "Where do you live?"

"Over there," answered the old woman, resting her load on a rock and pointing with extended lips.

Madame Chang soon learned that her hut was near by, that only she and her aged husband dwelt there, that their name was Whang (Yellow), that they were burners of charcoal, rarely had visitors and only met others when they descended the slopes to sell their small stock on the village streets.

Half an hour later found Madame Chang at the charcoal burner's humble hut. Very little lower could be imagined as a human habitation. A rift between two rocks had been roughly covered with boughs, bark and stones. A broken pot and a few bowls had been carried up from the plain, and these, with a crock or two, formed all connection with civilization. Yet within this wretched hut the aged woman and her de-

had plunged to a sudden struggle and ultimate death. Even if that were so it were better than capture, and she plunged deeper into the darkness. After a time the moon came suddenly out, leaping the mountain crests and sprinkling all with its bewitching splendour. She could now see more clearly, but realized that she must also proceed more cautiously as voices still called and little bands appeared unexpectedly from hidden homes and gulches. Ere long she reached the limit of the corn-fields and felt a new freedom as she entered the forest. But there was still no halting and she traveled on and on and ever upward into the night.

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crepit man dwelt—souls tender and charged with human kindness. Madame Chang readily discovered this in their offers of corn-mush and a cup of crude tea. Responsive to their advances, Madame Chang soon found herself telling the story of her capture and plight.

The old people listened in silence, evincing their interest by occasional nods of understanding and sympathy. Then slowly the gray-haired hostess told her humble tale.

"We have never been wealthy," said the old woman, "but we have known better days. We were raised as farmer folk among the rice-fields, grew up together, married and have had two sons and some daughters. These last, however, we 'threw away,' as we could not afford to raise them. We saved a few dollars and, later, moved to the village street. There the boys grew to manhood and, much against our will, as parents, went off to join the soldiers. For a time they sent back, at intervals, small sums of money. Then they went far away or had been lost—who knew?—for neither gift nor word has come from them for many years.

"Then the robbers raided the village. Our shop had in it a few rolls of cloth. These all disappeared, and poverty and starvation stared us in the face. There was only one choice, the towering mountain tops, and here we came. At dawn I wander forth to gather brushwood for the fires. These my husband tends, and when he is able, carries our small stock of charcoal or ashes to market, and, in return, brings back a few necessities of life."

"Do you think I can climb over the summit of the

mountain?" asked Madame Chang. "And is there any hope beyond the range?"

"We have climbed far up but know no pass," answered the old woman. "As to what lies beyond we have no knowledge."

"What can be done, then?"

"We cannot advise you," responded the old woman. "But you are welcome to remain in our small shack, although it will mean much trouble for us should you be discovered here."

But Madame Chang could not cut or carry brush, and how could she eat these old people's piteous bread of life? The man and his wife indicated that time pressed; they must needs be up and doing. That night they might talk again; and so they went forth to their rugged toil while Madame Chang crept forth among the shrubs to commune with her heart and high heaven.

Dreaming, devising, dozing, and then again almost in despair she wandered slowly from spot to spot. Then from a point of vantage she could oversee the long valley, all unconscious that at the same moment Lew-chee and her child were, from the opposite side of the great gorge, looking out upon the same scenes. By degrees her eyes wandered to the white spot on a distant slope which she could not but conclude marked the temple of their imprisonment. Then she thought of their escape and of the priest who had so strangely risked his life for them. She could not readily dismiss the thought. Here, at least, was a possible friend, one, too, who apparently was a man of resource and courage, who might render aid at such a time. Was he still alive? If so, would he again take risks for a

stranger? How might she make known her presence and her needs?

All afternoon she meditated upon the theme. That evening, on wandering back to her humble friends, she laid the matter before them.

"Do you know the temple?" she asked them.

"Yes," answered the woman, who did most of the talking for herself and her husband, "and even the priests. In better days my husband used to sell charcoal there."

"Would it still be possible to go there under pretext of selling and trust to circumstances for obtaining information?" Madame Chang asked.

"Yes, it might. The men may steal my load," the old man said, "but that is no great risk to run for a friend."

Madame Chang could give him but little description of the priest who had been their good providence, but the mountaineer needed no warning to be wary. He had dealt too long with danger and the world of men.

The evening was one of hope. The next morning at dawn the old charcoal-burner filled his basket and placing it firmly upon his back started upon his journey. Well before noon he had reached the temple and had little trouble making an entrance, though guards still stood by the doorway. Who could suspect so old and apparently stupid a peasant? He made his way to the temple kitchens and there found a priest who, he instinctively felt, was not of his ilk. He was too loud-voiced, too brazen in his attempted barter. The old man set down his load and waited. Feigning deafness, and pretending he could not hear this undesirable's words, he kept inquiring naively for the man he knew. After a time he elicited the information that

the one he was seeking was still alive but absent, and not expected to return for possibly half the day. But even that meant progress and the old man, remarking that he would wait, began to wander about the place.

There was little to see, however. Groups of men slept while others, curled up with opium lamp and pipe, were smoking dreamily. Still others sat at tables gambling, while larger groups stood near drinking and watching the progress of the game. A grizzled old villain with one eye permanently closed seemed to be the chief centre of both the game and the group. With his remaining eye, he seemed to take in the cards and the crowd by alternate flashes.

"Who's that old fellow?" he asked, noting the mountaineer as he wandered about the place. Two of the guard immediately approached and brought the old man before the tribunal. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?" asked the one-eyed man with a scowl. Again the burner feigned deafness, declared he was merely trying to sell his charcoal, was a native from the hills across the ravine. These facts being confirmed by some one present, the incident passed. But the old man carried away with him a permanent impression of the cunning and cruelty which glinted from that one apparently all-seeing eye. Had he known it then, he might not have worn his mask of innocence so placidly, for the grizzled bandit was none other than the notorious Feathered Hen. Even as it was, he had had hint enough that discretion was necessary. So finding his way back to the kitchens, he demanded a price that he knew might reasonably be forthcoming. Then learning that the priest he wanted would doubtless return by a certain path, he gathered up his basket,

ropes and small capital and unobtrusively left the temple.

Slowly descending the hill, he met his man, and after much maneuvering, succeeded in conveying the information he desired to give. Both men were naturally suspicious and non-committal, but the priest eventually hinted that he might call at the charcoal-pits that night.

True to his word, he came that evening, to find only the two aged burners sitting smoking by the door of their rude shack. But Madame Chang was not far distant—watching and listening to his voice through the darkness. Presently she came forth apparently somewhat to his surprise.

"Thank God you still live," she said. "Again I am at your mercy."

"But I thought you had crossed the river," he rejoined. "Where are the others?"

"No, they started to cross, but I remained, and am come here," she replied. "Do you know aught of their fate?"

The priest mused a few moments in silence; then he told of a rumor he had heard that the fugitives had succeeded in crossing, but were now being again pursued by dogs and men up the great slope opposite. Further than that he knew nothing.

Again was the mother's heart torn by conflicting hopes and fears, but she betrayed few outer signs. She had long since committed her life and that of her child to the Father of all. She inquired from the priest how he had succeeded in escaping on the fatal night.

"That," he answered, "was a simple matter. When the pursuers drew near, lured on by my firing, I simply gathered up my guns, ran down a side-slope well

known to me and watching my chance returned to the temple, unnoticed. The missing guns I hid away, and the natural conjecture was that they had been stolen by Lew-chee and his party."

Concerning the shambles in the temple he said little, save to remark that the reaction of the old-time robbers was explained by the appearance of The Feathered Hen in their midst and that no quarter had been given to the tenderfeet.

"As to the future," he said, "I'm afraid I can do nothing. Detection is so much more dangerous with the arch-bandit about." Finally, however, he agreed to return the following night and again report.

To the distracted mother the following day was a long and weary one. Despite her firm trust in a Divinity that shapes our ends and numbers even the hairs of our heads, she could not but picture the fugitives, hunted down by dogs, then captured and tortured by the cruel chief. She must give herself up, she decided, and strive to ameliorate their fate. Still she would wait until the evening for the priest and whatever news he might bring.

The news that night was again distracting. Word had been brought to the temple that the fugitives had been hunted to the very verge of the great precipice, had been seen to leap over, but although the forms of dogs and an old priest could be seen at its foot, the fugitives had not yet been discovered. The Feathered Hen, it was reported, was filled with alternate fury and superstitious fear by the report, and had himself departed to join the hunt.

"This last fact," said the priest, "is fortunate. With The Feathered Hen away there would be fewer of his followers at the temple and less vigilance. I

have thought, therefore, of a scheme which, of course, has its perils; but these are times to take risks. The first step is that the old woman here must pretend sickness, even to the point of death. This will mean that the old mountaineer must come regularly to the temple for medicine so that the priest, who has a small local fame as a physician, can frequently visit the coal kilns without suspicion. The priest will supply small contributions of cash for a few days, and naturally Madame Chang will be generous if the scheme succeeds."

Accordingly the next day the old man again wound his way up to the temple, quietly announcing that his "unworthy one" was sorely ill. There was need, however, of making the thing a matter of common knowledge all over the valley, especially among the robbers and their bands. So the next night the sorcerers were called up from the village below. According to these men all disease is caused by devils which must be cast out ere the patient can recover. They came accordingly straggling up the hill carrying scrolls bearing pictures of their demon-expelling gods, chief among them being the Pearly Emperor and the god of thunder; they also brought drums, fifes, gongs and a couple of crocks. After a meal provided by the priest and a few kindly neighbours from down the mountainside, the sorcerers set to work.

Groaning most audibly, the old woman lay within the small shack upon some boughs of evergreen, her body covered by some straw matting and a badly patched quilt. Without, at the entrance, the sorcerers hung their gods, each man selecting his instrument, and while the leader shouted and howled by turns from his mystic books, the cadence and discords of the

noises rose and fell. For two hours this proceeded, the dissonances rising higher and wilder as the night wore on. Then, with a final burst of shrieking and shrill falsetto with the drums, horns and cymbals all clashing hideously, the leader suddenly dropped his horn and seizing a jar, ran out into the semi-darkness.

"He's come! He's come!" he howled. "Help! Help!"

"He's come!" echoed the rest, and rushed forth to join him.

Then followed more shouting, screaming and hysterical confusion. Then with face suffused with sweat and smiles the leader returned, carrying a small earthen pot prominently in his outstretched hands, and assured all ostentatiously that they had captured the tormenting spirit. The latter was safely imprisoned within the crock. The patient, the leader, further assured the company would now recover rapidly, unless indeed other ill-disposed devils should again possess her. In that case, the band must again be sent for in haste. Delay would undoubtedly be most dangerous.

The old charcoal-burner bowed them respectfully down the hill. The priest departed well pleased. Madame Chang returned from her place of hiding and old Mrs. Whang arose from her bed, truly free of evil spirits for the time being. But next day the news spread through the valley that the demons had returned. It was useless to further trouble the solicitous sorcerers. A coffin stoutly constructed but full of vents was secured with the aid of the priest's credit and slowly carried up the long mountain slope. In the depths of the night following Mrs. Whang (so report had it) suddenly died, and was as speedily as possible

encoffined in the rude box, the priest conducted the simple funeral ceremony according to the Buddhist ritual alone, and the procession, attended by but few, wound down the hill.

The old worn-out worker had come from the country beyond the village. It was her wish to be permitted to sleep at last beside her ancestors, whither her aged husband must also follow ere long.

Through the village streets the small procession passed. A half-clad beggar beating a gong went before, scattering cash paper to purchase the way against ever-present devils. Another carried the small paper tablet of the departed, while a third bore a big paper lantern to light the road for her soul now in the land of shades. The aged mountaineer, clad literally in sackcloth, hobbled next, leading with a long strip of white cloth the poor body to its long last home. The coffin itself, a great black structure made of thick slabs of wood and well covered with shellac to prevent decay and the entrance of demons, was carried by eight men (an Empress would have required at least one hundred), came on slowly, guarded by a young cock. The latter sat prominently upon the lid for inasmuch as its species dares to crow in the dark, it is traditionally a terror by night or day to demons. Lastly followed the priest and a few friends, all on foot; for who could afford chairs or barrows in such a case of charity?

They were just leaving the village when there was a sudden clash. The Feathered Hen and his gang had returned and in high dudgeon. The facts were out now as to the escape of the fugitives, at least of one of them. Both had descended the almost impossible precipice, after unparalleled insult to the gang, and the

youth—curse him!—had crawled aboard a raft and forced his way out. As to the girl and the mother, they had searched everywhere but without results. Now they must be discovered, dead or alive, and every avenue must be watched as for a rat.

"Who are these villains, and what are they carrying?" howled the mad, half-drunken chief, as he came alongside.

The old coal-burner fell upon his knees and hastened to explain. It was his wife. She had died but two days ago. They were carrying her forth. But the fatal eye of fury was upon him. He was recognized.

"You!" shouted the bandit chief in rage. "I've seen you before. You're the prowler of the temple! You spy!"

The old man grovelled in the dust of the road, but with no avail.

"Down with that box!" raved the chief. "Tear it open! Who knows what's inside. We can't be caught that way!"

A half dozen of his followers rushed forward and began to pound the coffin with the butts of their guns. But the big slabs resisted stubbornly.

"Fetch axes!" hissed The Feathered Hen, himself tearing at the lid.

Fortunately axes were not so readily secured. Meantime the priest was busy whispering to some of the bystanders. Headed by the priest they came forward and prostrated themselves before the infuriated leader. Let not the generalissimo whom they all so trusted bring disaster upon their village. The deceased was indeed the wife of the mountaineer. The sorcerers could bear witness, and there were others.

All the valley and village knew the facts. Let the chief inquire. But the chief was in no mood for inquiry.

"Fetch axes," he again roared in rage. "We will have heads as well as the box."

One axe had arrived and a lieutenant stood ready to strike. With white face he turned to his chief.

"Sire," he said, "you know I am no coward. But this is attacking the dead, not the living. Recall the disaster that came to us when we 'borrowed' things from those graves of the wealthy Lan family!"

He could see that his words had carried home and he proceeded: "I have a better way. Let me and a few of 'the brothers' go along to see that there is no fraud. Let us take no further risk of angering the gods."

The words had touched the aged bandit's one weak spot. He and others had been seriously ill of small-pox, contracted probably from the graves they had opened seeking to rob a recently buried body. Death had come to many of his chosen band, and he himself bore many marks of the ravage of that dire plague. His decision came as quickly as had his demoniacal rage, and stepping aside he ordered the speaker and five others to follow the procession.

Late that day saw a little group gathered by a few graves some miles distant from the village. There was no deep excavation as in western lands. A necromancer having ascertained the element predominant when the deceased was born, glanced about to see what way the body should lie so that no evil influences might rob the dead of prosperity in the world of shades, adjusted the coffin to the proper angle and the burial ceremonies were completed. The bearers

and a few rustics who had gathered heaped the coffin over with larger stones until a big round mound capped with an inverted sod cone had been obtained and all was over. The old mountaineer made some final prostrations to his departed and then, to avoid suspicion, joined the robber guard and started back for the village, reaching it shortly after nightfall. There the old mourner and the priest sat for a time in a tea shop, then slowly departed, the priest for his temple, the aged burner for his now desolate home.

But the early moonlight that evening saw a strange sight at the recent grave. Three people were there. It would have required little observation to realize that two of them were the priest and coal-burner. It would have required a more careful scrutiny to recognize the third as Madame Chang. But she it was, very pale in the moonlight, but with a face that still spoke of firm faith and high courage. It was she who had occupied the strange conveyance, and though she had not been aware of all that had passed, she had been all too conscious of the furious attack on her narrow bed in the village streets and the long wait in her living grave. Breathing had been somewhat difficult after the mound was raised, but even death can be faced in confidence when an inner consciousness gives assurance of duty bravely done.

The next morning a small and weary quartet was well on its way to the big capital. The graveside trio had been joined by the old, bent form of the charcoal woman some miles back, a place which she had reached by a long detour and where she had waited warily amid many hopes and fears. They had no money with which to hire chairs or procure food, but they were free, and that gave great stimulus to their

efforts. That night found the priest in the safe retreat of the temple so recently a solace for Lew-chee. It found Madame Chang in her own home, an object of vast thanksgiving and rejoicing, and her two aged friends comfortably housed and fed in one of the small courts of her residence, a place they were to enjoy until they were called to their Higher Home. Best of all, was the news of Mae Jen's escape, and that now, although seriously ill, she was making slow but sure recovery in the great mission hospital.

XII

A DUEL WITH DEATH

ONE of the thrill of this happy consummation in the Chang home came to Lew-chee as he trudged wearily eastward. Day by day, time and the long train of animals, men and things dragged on. Out in the country all save the decrepit old and the helpless young fled as the column advanced. In the villages and smaller cities many of the streets were deserted. Merchants had long since learned to fear these soldier-bands who, though they might refrain from open robbery, still made little pretense of paying for food, shelter, sandals, clothing, or other items they might fancy. Possibly more pitiable still, scarce a day passed but somewhere along the rude highway mules, horses, cattle and men lay by the way dead or dying. Heat, hardship, hunger, brutality, sooner or later brought them low.

Lew-chee beheld more than one of his fellow-carriers cruelly beaten by the butt of a gun, kicked, cursed, prodded by poles, and in one case an unfortunate who had fallen utterly exhausted, cruelly run through by a mere boy who wielded a bayonet, and left to welter in the ditch. As for himself, his strong body seemed to bear up heroically. His muscles even strengthened under the strain and he plodded patiently on, accepting the inevitable.

One day they crossed a low range of hills. Not a few of the carriers fell out that day, and next morning

found many bundles without bearers. Lew-chee was forced to double his load. Still he struggled on. They started out on the plain and the sun streamed down steadily, cruelly. Noon found him almost exhausted. Then his head began to spin with a strange giddiness. He stumbled from side to side and was liberally cursed and kicked for his wavering. An hour later and the world was swirling all about him. He reached a small bridge where a great banyan tree spread its inviting shade and leaned himself against it while those in front might pass. Summoned by his guard again to proceed he took a few steps forward. The bridge and its approach swam before him. He stepped again, lost his path, plunged forward and rolled headlong down the bank to the creek-bed below.

What followed he could never recall. Some one told him vaguely of his wrathful guard rushing below, and endeavouring vainly to rouse him with the usual storm of curses and kicks, of two coolies captured in the nearby village being led down sometime after to bear his load, and of the guard departing with a parting curse and prod from his bayonet. He remembered waking with the new crescent moon peeping under the bridge, a feeling of many bruises upon his body and a new, strange sting in his shoulder. Then he apparently swooned away and only fitful, half-frightful fancies disturbed his weariness.

When again consciousness returned he found the midday sun shining full upon him. He lay motionless for a time trying to realize what had happened. Slowly it came back, his far-away home in the hills, his great adventure forth, his capture in the village, the awful night with the tethered swine, the temple, his first meeting with Mae Jen and her mother, the

flight, the pursuit and the precipice, the raft, the glad release, and then his sister's doom, his sweetheart's death. Yes, then the soldiers had seized him and like a beast of burden, he had fallen. But they had gone now, and a strange stillness reigned in the small river-bed.

"Yet, after all, I am still alive," he said to himself, and a thrill of satisfaction swept over him.

This feeling, however, was but short-lived. Other and gloomier thoughts occupied his mind.

"What have I to live for?" he thought. "Would that I were dead. Why was I not killed when I fell?"

Through his head shot sudden throbs of pain as he tried to drag himself under the shade of the bridge and the great banyan tree. As he did so, acute pains darted through his body and once again something stabbed in his shoulder like a knife. Once more he swooned and lay long and seemingly lifeless.

When next he returned to consciousness he was in utter darkness, and something was tugging at his leg. Another tug, followed by a sharp pain. He kicked out with what feeble strength he had and an ugly snarl greeted his effort. Another growl made him aware that dogs were fighting by his side, snarling, bowling, tumbling over him in their savage struggle. He shuddered at the significance of it all. He tried to shout, to seize some small stones that lay beneath him and hurl at his enemies, but again his pains pierced him and rendered his efforts all but futile. He lay back while the beasts fought on.

"Why should I not submit," he said half-aloud, "and let the hungry curs have their way? Death will come the sooner. Why not? Surely life is but a lie. Who has proved that better than myself?"

He lay quiet and resigned. Again he felt the brutes approaching, could feel their muzzles sniffing him. A wild impulse stirred within him and he struck out savagely with the stones. Again he heard the snarling and yelping and again he swung out wildly. Then suddenly his burst of vigour left him and he again fell back unconscious.

Dawn again brought consciousness. Perhaps it was the sun that revived him shining full upon his eyeballs. There, too, sat his enemies of the night—three of them—scraggy, gaunt, desperate creatures. Lewchee gazed at them half pityingly. How the hunger leered and leaped from their eyes! Why had he not let them have their way? Had not his intellect consented that that was best? Yes, he remembered that. Then why had he struggled so savagely? He thought that over and over at intervals all through the day and again as night approached and his tormentors returned ever and anon to watch and wait and lick their watery chops. Why should he not give up the struggle when reason said 'twere well? Reason seemed too feeble to answer her own query then, but something insisted that he struggle.

And struggle he did as the days went by. What his malady was he did not know. The exhaustion, the beatings, the wound in his shoulder seemed to pass after a time, but still his head swam and split with sudden pain. A weird weakness, too, possessed him. He had no thought of food, even were such to be had, but drank at times from a small hole in the sand which he had scooped after much pain. In later years he considered that he suffered from sunstroke, or possibly it was typhoid or some other fever, contracted from the water he drank in desperation after the awful

night with the pig in the shack. He did not essay to ask such questions at the time. He swooned and slept and woke by times to suffer, on and on.

Many passed over the bridge as the days went by. The majority bent on their own affairs never noticed the huddled figure in the gulch below. Some saw, but Lew-chee well knew their thoughts.

"He is but a stranger—a beggar," they would be thinking, "what has that to do with us? Let his own friends attend him if he has any. If he has none then so much the worse for him."

Others, more superstitious, passed the place even more rapidly. Some hideous devil quite evidently had him in his grips, perhaps some enemy whom he had formerly wronged and who was now repaying the grudge from the land of shades. Why should others interfere in such a vendetta. It would only mean the involving of themselves. "Let the fellow fight out his own follies. Who wanted to become compromised with the powers of darkness?"

Thus Lew-chee received no aid from his fellows. Nor did he expect any, though at times something within him looked up wistfully at passersby and appealed piteously for help. Night after night the dogs came to leer hideously in the moonlight, or snarl and snuffle in the darkness. With them came swarms of mosquitoes, and rats, the latter to creep through his sadly soiled clothing, and scurry away in the darkness. By day magpies drew near and nearer to peer into his glassy eyes, and flocks of crows summoned each other regularly, and ruthlessly in anticipation of a carrión feast. Each time he dozed he hoped that there might be no waking; yet each time as death drew near

he would wake to fight his feeble best. Strange, and to Lew inexplicable fate!

As the days dragged by another danger threatened. The small stream was rising. He had welcomed the sudden downpours of rain. They soothed the fever that devoured him. But each time he could not but note that the waters of the brook became higher and broader. One night they had bathed his feet and he had awakened more fully alive to this new terror.

"But why trouble?" he thought philosophically. "Drowning I have always heard is a quick, painless passage into the Beyond. Why struggle?"

Yet struggle he did, as before, and, finally, with much effort he dragged himself to the bank where the gnarled roots of the great banyan groped themselves down. Then one day and all night, and again the next day there came a deluge such as only can come in far Szechwan! The river rose as by leaps and bounds, and again he felt his feet submerged.

He called piteously, though he knew no one could hear. He prayed fervently to Buddha, to Amitabha in his Western Paradise, to the little Hunchback, to his mother, to Mae Jen's God, to all the gods he could remember or had ever heard of. Clutching the roots of the banyan-tree he succeeded in raising his head above the river-bed. But the relentless waters followed him. He felt his body submerging and it gave a strange sense of refreshment and relief. It reached upward to his loins and again he struggled until he sat almost upright. Then he could go no further. If there were gods why did they not help in such a struggle? If they wanted him to leave for their fairer land, then why this frenzied fiend within him that would not let him die? He had only to throw him-

self over upon his side, float down with the rushing stream, and all would be ended. As he thus meditated, he felt the waters washing about his loins. A few moments later they were laying his shoulders and touching soothingly the place where the wound was on his breast.

He relaxed his grip and felt his body turn into the tide. Then he frantically seized again the great roots of the banyan, and aided now by the floods, fought his way upward. He never quite knew how it happened. Perhaps it was the touch of his feet upon the roots of the tree for the first time; possibly the river gave unexpected assistance; or it may have been that inexplicable something within him which refused reason's voice, and clung so to life that lent desperation to his departing strength. But at any rate, stretching his arm upward he felt the sword upon the bank and with a frantic effort reached the surface above. There he rolled over and over till his body touched the bark of the big tree. He patted it pathetically, threw his head upon its rough upturned roots and slept. The Something within him had conquered, and could now seek repose.

By next day the storm had spent itself, but the skies still lowered and drizzled drearily. Lew-chee awoke to find himself still under the great banyan, its mighty arms wide-spread as wings welcoming the weary to its shelter. He began to think of Gautama, the Lion of the Sakya tribe, who long centuries since had attained to Buddhahood—Enlightenment—under such a tree. He recalled also the scenes by the palace which had sent the Indian youth among the distant hills in search of the secret of life and of salvation.

"Have I not myself, here in my own land seen

many times the things that so shocked the tender soul of that noble youth of another land?" he mused. "Gautama had shuddered at the sight of a hoary head and bent body, decrepit with age, then of one sitting, groaning, despairing with disease, and lastly a corpse, putrefying by the pathway. Are these not almost everyday sights in my own day? And Buddha, sitting under his tree concluded that all life was sorrow, that the basis of that sorrow was sin, and the cause of that sin was universal desire. Deepest of all these desires is the desire for life itself. That, too, is also a delusion, a deception, and must be destroyed, utterly annihilated. So the Buddha must have reasoned far away and long ago in the land beyond the great mountains to the west.

"Yes, the Buddha reasoned thus, and truly. His abbot, after a vain attempt to follow Confucius and reform the world, had also so reasoned. And I, myself? Have I not repeatedly reasoned similarly—in the shack with the swine; on the rope as I swung over the raging stream; by the precipice when death seemed but a step away; and now, again, during these long days when disease, and dogs, carrion crows and gurgling floods grappled for my life? Have I not endlessly argued that life was deception, a lie! And yet I live! Why?"

Then came what seemed to him to be his Enlightenment. It was that reason is not the root of life. That those very desires of which the Buddha taught are deeper, more powerful than reason, or at least than such reasoning as the sage had summoned to their solution.

"Have I not myself reasoned my soul to silence repeatedly?" Lew-chee continued to meditate, "and has

not that basic desire for life sprung forth blindly at the crisis and clung and clamoured and fought for existence? Even the lower world around us is pregnant with desire. It called with the voices of the crows, looked leeringly out of the eyes of the hunger-haunted pack, even shouted from the swirling waters as they rushed riotously to the sea. Let men give up all desire and a manless world would still remain, and desire would be its dynamic lord. No wonder as the centuries have passed, that the followers of the Buddha have grown ever fewer. He demanded from man the impossible, the irrational, ultimately, the undesirable!"

It was but natural, perhaps, that in the first flush of this seeming new discovery the youth should swing to an extreme reaction. Since reason seemed wrong it must be abandoned. Since desire appeared lord of life, it must in everything be supreme. He had done well to fight every foe. Struggle, strife should henceforth be the watchword of every life. Something of the old impulse—perchance a survival of his soldier-ancestors—stirred within him despite his extreme weakness, and he made a spasmodic effort to rise. But the effort was too great. Again he fell back and slept for hours.

Waking once again his mind fastened at once upon his new-found theme. Yes, he would fight this disease and death to the utmost. He would live. Desire should have its fling and he would be free. That evening the storm cleared and a few pedestrians began to appear. Low-chee suddenly found himself holding out his hand for alms, a subtle undertone of demand filling his feeble voice. He received but a cash or two for his initial effort, but the next day he was more successful. The sunshine came forth and with it the

crowds in better spirits. He gathered in several cash and with them bought an orange and some rice-water from an old woman who set up regularly a small table of sundries under the great tree. Life began to run more normally. The following days brought varying success, but there was always enough for snatches of food and drink. He sat up and plied his trade more assiduously. His note of demand became more insistent. He desired to live, had as much right to live as these hurrying farmers and merchants, carriers and travelers. Possibly the primitive craving of hunger added power to his new philosophy of life. He clung to it tenaciously. All men were bundles of desires. Triumph was with him who could struggle hardest! Why scruple?

Yes, why scruple? Why even ask the question? Yet ask the question he *did*, not only then but many times during the following days. His new doctrine that desires should dominate all, seemed simplicity itself, yet it raised within him inconvenient qualms of conscience. But with returning health he began to throw himself recklessly into his newly found freedom. A very little thought brought him the realization that pity would secure more cash, so he set himself to make his wound more gaping and hideous with dye from a bit of red paper. He desired money—the deception brought it. Why scruple? Sympathy from passers-by was deeper still for those wounded by robbers. So on a scrap of paper he wrote a short but stirring statement of such an encounter, one in which the whole of his family had been slain. It was a deeper lie, but he desired more money—so did his benefactors. It was simply that his desire had triumphed over theirs. Desire was the only arbitrator. Why scruple?

So it went on, from day to day. Though feigning absolute helplessness by day, he could get up and wander to and fro in the night. Hunger and his new philosophy was great, sharpening his wits and bringing back his strength. Then the unexpected happened. He learned that Colonel Wong, with whom he had been compelled to march as beast of burden, had gone forward to join General Chang in a fight against another party from Chungking. This he had gathered from the talk of passing strangers as they rested under the shade of the big banyan. He wondered much, at the time, that General Chang, the father of his vanished sweetheart, could countenance such oppression. Now he seemed to understand it. Consciously or unconsciously, General Chang was simply practising his, Lew-chee's, new theory. He desired men to bear those burdens, and might was right. Somehow he could refrain from modifying that slightly because of a thought of his lost loved one, and finally satisfy himself by thinking that General Chang *might* not know, but that certainly Colonel Wong was a disciple of his new desire-doctrine. Yes; it was beastly, but it was basic. Why scruple?

The unexpected news was that Colonel Wong's regiment was retreating. That came one day rather suddenly as Lew-chee lay outstretched under the tree moaning lustily. For a moment he forgot his part and almost sprang to his feet in surprise. The news was true. At dusk of the next night a steady stream of men wearing the uniform he recognized began hurrying back, making the best use possible of the darkness. Toward the middle of the night the hurrying became a stampede. Men and mules came scurrying over the small bridge, struggling, swearing, scampering one

ahead of the other in utter rout. It was not safe to be in the path of such a horde, so Lew-chee took refuge on the farther side of the great tree, secreting himself among the roots. By the small hours of the morning men who moved more slowly appeared. These were the wounded. Some were borne on improvised stretchers made from a couple of newly-cut bamboo poles. Others, with only arm or head wounds, walked with the aid of friends. A few strove to make the journey alone. These would rest for a moment on the roots of the tree, groan and then grope their way onward.

When the last of the stragglers had passed Lew-chee stole out from his retreat. He peeped over the bridge, then down the way they had departed. Something gray in the dim starlight caught his eye. He approached it cautiously. Without doubt it was the form of a man—one of the wounded who could go no further and had fallen in the flight. Lew-chee bent low to examine him, spoke to him, and felt his hands and face. He was quite dead and already turning cold. He lay upon his face just as he had fallen, his gun still strapped across his back and his double belts of cartridges across his chest.

A sudden impulse came to the youth. Why not possess himself of the stranger's accoutrements? Unwanted qualms rose within him, and for a little while he shrank from the idea.

"The villagers will do it in the morning," he mused apologetically, "and the oncoming army will certainly do so with short ceremony. Indeed, the man's own companions would have stripped him had they not been in such haste. Why should I hesitate? Why scruple?"

He did not. In a few minutes he had the gun, cartridges, and tunic. Small-clothes would do well enough for the dead, and they would go, too, as soon as some one found the body. Lew also found some cash and three silver dollars in the man's pouch and these he seized eagerly. He gathered all together into an improvised bundle and made ready to depart. Nothing was to be gained by delaying longer under the great tree and should the enemy advance there might be danger. He would work his way slowly back to the capital, and home. He was not so sure of the latter with his new theories of things, but that could wait. There would be ready sale for his bundle, part by part, somewhere, and the proceeds meant food for some days to come. His health was almost fully restored, although he was outwardly dishevelled, dirty and generally disgusting. Hope sprang high in his breast and demanded haste for the dawn approached.

Then the pangs of hunger touched him. He must not go hungry. He knew that the old woman who plied her meagre trade under the tree hid her small wares nightly in a basket among the great roots for convenience. She had even given him a small acknowledgment daily for guarding them at night. He would help himself to some of her peanuts, oranges, and small cakes and be off. He readily found the basket and made another small bundle out of some of the contents. Then he upset the basket, letting the remainder roll out on the ground as though it had been robbed. Why not? She would believe the retreating soldiers had discovered her stores. And he would be gone, he who had guarded them each night. She would never suspect *him*. More likely she would be-

lieve that he had fled from the rabble, and possibly pity him.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed. "This is becoming real freedom, real frolic,—this pitting of desire against desire! Deceit is a great asset."

Chuckling to himself, he started on his way. The roosters were already crowing, which warned him that he must hurry or the farmers or villagers would detect him.

Picking up his bundles, he gave the old woman's box a contemptuous parting kick. That was just a bit of punctuation to mark his breaking with the bonds of the past. No more suppression of desires or their annihilation. Such stuff! Such simple silliness! He took a dozen steps quickly. Then he paused. It was that wretched old woman who seemed to hold him. She *was* wretched. A dollar would buy out all her stock-in-trade. She had been kind to him, in a rough way, had trusted him. Then, too, some one might be dependent on her. She was probably somebody's mother. Ah, yes, and he, too, had had a mother.

"Confound these qualms," he cried impatiently. "They unman me. But I will think them out later."

Again he started, but again he stopped. This time he stole back hastily and hustled the old woman's articles back into the box, together with the small bundle he had made, except a couple of oranges. In their stead he placed a shining dollar wrapped in the piece of paper he had used to advertise his supposed bad treatment at the hands of robbers. She would understand that assuredly. A smile stole over his dirt-begrimed face. He closed the box-lid quietly and gave it a parting pat. Then picking up his bundle, he ran quickly up the road.

XIII

IN FLIGHT AND FIGHT

LEW-CHEE did not follow the main road far. Someone at a distance could be seen approaching, so he took to the ridges among the rice-fields, winding gradually away and to the north. Occasionally farmers at work observed him but kept a respectful reserve as they could not but see the gun which he had slung over his shoulder. Their silence gave him another suggestion. If they respected a gun so, why not assume the role of a full-fledged soldier? Finding a secluded spot among some clumps of bamboo, he opened his bundle and donned the full uniform. The coat was rather tight and the trousers decidedly short, but the long roll of cloth leggings remedied the latter defect. The peaked cap seemed to fit poorly when set on straight, but by pulling it far forward or setting it well back, it could be made to stick. As for the shoes, they were only badly-worn straw sandals, so he discarded them altogether. From childhood he had been accustomed to going about among the hills in his bare feet so these soft paths among the fields gave him no annoyance. So girding the small money-sack about his loins, crossing his breast with the cartridge belts and strapping his belt and bayonet about him, and his gun behind him, he issued forth a fully armed fighting man.

A little wayside brook into which he gazed gave him a full view of his new figure. His face could be

decidedly improved, he thought, and his long hair. So he washed the former and brushed back the latter as best he could. The results were wholly satisfactory. As he stood up to continue his journey he was changed, not only his countenance, but also in character. Despite the aggressive daring he had shown in his role of beggar, he now began to despise himself for the deception he had practised. He became conscious now of a new self-respect, a new dignity, and the transformation worked wonders also among those he met. Here and there the people on the little side-roads stood aside to let him pass. Even well-dressed travelers made sure that their chairs and carriers did not annoy his progress. As to food, he might pay for it or not as he wished, so he paid what he pleased and went his way. Ah, here was a glad release. By some good fortune he had struck upon the very means needed to make his new discovery of the meaning of life successful. He could now allow desire to run its perfect course and be glorified.

On the next day he had a small adventure. As he passed through the country, avoiding even the villages as much as possible, he saw right ahead of him some men running together. Soon one of them began to beat a gong with great vigour. As the little group seemed to be coming his way, he could not long mistake the meaning. They were evidently arousing the local militia and undoubtedly he was their objective. They probably wanted his gun and ammunition, and would not be at all particular as to his life. Soon each big, walled enclosure, which stood for a farmhouse and buildings, would be sending forth its men. Some of them would be indifferently armed with old spears, swords, bird-guns, but others would have rifles

purchased or forced from disbanded soldiers. Yes, there could be little doubt that he was their objective. What was to be done?

Already they were shouting to him, ordering him to stand still.

"Stop!" they cried to him—"stop at once!"

He might do that and thus save his skin. But what of his newly found freedom? No, he would *not* stop. It would mean his being stripped, pounded, and in a trice be left naked, penniless, reduced to beggarhood again. As a youth in the hills, he had usually carried nothing more than a spear or a club. But when the farmers went forth to fight the wild boar, it was different. Often he had stolen forth with the hunters and fine marksmen as they were, had received some praise for his skill. Now was the time to try it. There must be no hesitation as with the robbers by the precipice. Then, Mae Jen had to be considered, and his teachings as to the sacredness of life tethered him. Now he was free, and would fight for it. Unslinging his gun as rapidly as possible, he slipped in his cartridges, and raised it to his shoulder.

"Stay right where you are," he cried. "If any of you come nearer I shall shoot, and shoot straight."

Unprepared for this action, the men instantly obeyed.

But this was only the beginning of the fray, and that Lew-chee knew well. He looked about him. Away in the distance were some low hills. These seemed the most likely spot for safety, so he headed towards them. As he expected, he had not proceeded far when the gong again began to beat, accompanied by great shouting. His enemies were following him. They were arousing the countryside, a process which,

hoary with age, would widen as it advanced. Few could hope escape this network of militant farmers. The die was cast and he must make the best of it. Lew-chee zigzagged across the rice-fields, running as fast as he could. He saw men hurrying from the fields to their homes. They had not brought their arms to their daily toil and were hastening back to get them. This gave him a fair start on his pursuers.

Fifteen minutes later, little groups of men appeared all around him. They were undoubtedly closing in on him. A few minutes later shots were fired and he heard the bullets beginning to sing above his head. Still he ran toward the hills. He was nearer them now, and held on his way steadily. But the local bands divined his intent and were shouting vigourously. He saw one group hiding behind some bamboos right in his way. He must have it out with them and that speedily. He paused for an instant, took steady aim and fired into the thicket. The excitement gave him nerve. A second shot went home. Three men sprang up and bolted, one shouting wildly as he went. Lew-chee lost no time. He dashed through the opening and came to some corn-fields that fringed the hills.

Rushing wildly in, he breathed deeply, feeling he was now free. The bullets whistling about him only served to quicken his speed. But another surprise awaited him. Two men sprang out suddenly upon him—one armed with a sword, the other with an old, but vicious-looking trident. They were too close in on him to admit of his using his rifle, so he swung desperately about him with the butt and succeeded in making some advance. Others were, however, running up rapidly shouting encouragement to their comrades as they came. Lew-chee was winded with run-

ning and his two adversaries slashed and struck at him savagely. Yet he had the advantage of size and bore down upon them with grim determination. With a sudden feint, he drew the man with the trident closer, then as suddenly knocked his weapon spinning and broken from his grasp. Then he began to back quickly from the swordsman, dodging among the growing corn as he parried. By this time some of the others were scarcely fifty feet away, and he knew he must again run for it. He lunged at his antagonist, missed his aim, turned to take advantage of the movement for flight, and then suddenly stumbled and fell sprawling hopelessly among the corn.

An unseen rock had caught his feet and sent him headlong. The runners in the corn sent up a wild yell of triumph. The swordsman, recovering himself, sprang forward to deal his blow. Then suddenly he stopped, staggered backwards, reeled and fell. At the same moment Lew-chee heard the report of rifles and many feet rushed over, and past him. Glancing up he was amazed to see soldiers' uniforms between him and the farmers. He sprang to his feet with alacrity. There was a fight on and he must join the fray. Already his assailants were retreating hurriedly and he dashed forward. The men in uniform rushed as far as the fringes of the corn-fields, paused for a moment, then turned and ran for the hills. Lew-chee mixing with their ranks, followed the retreat. He paused for a second to snatch the sword from his fallen foe. Why not bury it in his squirming form? The wounded man looked up piteously, and placing his hands together pleaded mutely for life. Lew-chee raised the blade. This man would have shown *him* no mercy, why should he? Why scruple? He brought down the

sword with a flash, but even as it descended, swerved it aside. It plunged deep into the soil. There he left it and ran after the soldiers.

The band assembled in a great cave up among the hills. There were not more than twenty of them. Mainly, they were men of Colonel Wong's regiment with a few from others. Scattered after their recent defeat, they had gradually gathered and banded themselves together for mutual protection and profit. The latter included attacks, mostly at night, upon the local farmers, carrying off such desirables as rice, chickens, pigs and clothing. Only the day previous they had had an early morning brush with the local militia. The latter were, however, well organized and had succeeded in beating off the attack. Thus the band had been forced to retire, and that hastily, as the reverberations of the big gongs brought husky braves from far and near. Again hearing the alarm, and their lookouts announcing that apparently one of their number was in distress, the band had rallied and burst upon the scene just in time to rescue Lew-chee from the fury of the patient yet pitiless train-bands.

Lew-chee's new companions asked him but few questions. Being men from everywhere or nowhere, with records not to be referred to publicly, they accepted him as one of their kind. His uniform and rifle told them all they thought to be necessary. A few advised him to cut off his distinguishing numbers and in return for their suggestion borrowed some of his ammunition. A small squad commander appeared to be recognized as leader. Him Lew-chee saluted, and after a brief conversation was assigned a place in the gang and cave.

They were not to stay long in this place, however.

It had not proved healthy, and this day's doings would render the atmosphere even less salubrious.

"The whole countryside will probably make an attempt to surround us, wipe us out," said the leader. "This evening we must cross the range and go quietly down the other side."

At nightfall this movement was accomplished, and a couple of their number, dressed in the farmer-clothing they had secured, went out to reconnoitre. They made their way to a small market-village where sitting long over successive cups of tea, they soon learned the news of the neighbourhood. To their astonishment, they were told that Colonel Wong had rallied their comrades at some place to the rear and had passed through the village the day previously, apparently hurrying forward to again join the fight. General Chang, it was reported, was sorely pressed, but although forced to retreat, was holding out stoutly against great odds.

When the news was brought back to the waiting group it created much excitement. Some were for going forward at once. Others, and they did not hesitate to say so openly, had had enough of fighting with a real foe, and much preferred raids upon unexpectant homes and villages. Lew-chee said little, but his general inclination was for action. He could not but remember that General Chang was the father of his little dead loved one, and he admired the pluck which report said he showed in facing a far outnumbering force. A consultation was held and a compromise effected. They would go forward cautiously. If their comrades lost in the struggle, they would be the first in the retreat, if their side won they would not be far behind when the great rush forward came which all knew

well meant plunder, lawless loot. Lew-chee squirmed a bit at the decision. Something in him seemed to protest against such tactics. But he squashed such qualms quickly.

"Life is but a war of desires," he cogitated. "The end justifies the means. Why trouble over a bit of trickery? Why scruple?"

A few hours later and they were on the march. They did not keep to the hills and fields, but made boldly for the highway. They advertised themselves as a company of Colonel Chang's troops hurrying to the front. Entering a village, they surprised a couple of rice-shops, ate their fill, slept boldly in the best inn and were off the next morning at dawn, carrying the inn's big, wadded quilts with them. Lew-chee even found himself forcing a protesting labourer to carry his quilt and gun. It was will against will, and why should he not win? But some memories of his own wretchedness seemed to trouble him. But he shook them off.

"Pshaw!" he laughed. "This fellow is not loaded as I have been. This having a heart is only an old habit which would be, must be rooted out."

Yet he yielded sufficiently to his better impulses to see that the man was well fed at the next village and then marched on!

That night Lew-chee found himself in prominence among the band. So far he had marched promiscuously with the crowd. Once again his ability to write readily gave him a seat beside the officer. A message must be sent forward to Colonel Wong. They would still use their judgment, of course, as to how much real fighting they did, but it was well that he be made aware of their presence. Otherwise they might not

share in the honours, or especially the spoils. Pay also was a question. True, they rarely received any in times of peace, or at any rate but a pittance of what was their allowance, but should victory come their way some of this arrears might be forthcoming. At any rate all agreed that their presence should be known, and Lew-chee, after some canvass of abilities, was called upon to write the letter. That was easily accomplished. What surprised him more was that he should also be selected as the proper person to bear the message.

Next morning he set off, flushed with his new rôle. The band would follow more slowly, awaiting his return. As he advanced he could hear far on the horizon the booming of some big guns. An hour later the distant crackling of rifles and the rattle of machine guns came upon the breeze. He was surprised on inquiry to find that he had almost stumbled upon Colonel Wong's headquarters. Lew-chee had rather expected to find his new chief heroically battling in the very thick of the fight, leading a forlorn attack, possibly. Eventually he found him in the official room of a small inn, seated with others at a table and apparently much absorbed in a game of cards.

From a short distance Lew-chee observed him. What he saw was a small wiry man aged about forty. Some birthmark or scar drew down his face on the left side and gave it a highly sinister expression. The movements of his head were quick and alert, the movement of his hands deft, almost subtly canny. He played out his cards quickly and decisively, while his companions appeared to hesitate. They were utterly absorbed in the game, but Wong apparently could, and did, command all the courtyard at a glance. He noted

Lew-chee's approach and waited while an orderly came forward to announce his business. A single nod from the slightly bald head and Lew-chee stepped forward and stood at attention, while Colonel Wong read the despatch. This he did with little more than a glance. Then with small, beady eyes he looked up sharply at the youth. He asked no questions. Turning to the game again, he played his turn deftly, then called sharply for his secretary. The orderly ran to find him but returned in a few moments to say that the secretary could not be found. The Colonel threw down another card, and brought down his fingertips resoundingly on the table.

"Away again!" he said testily, his drawn face working weirdly the while. Then he added, "Find someone else, sharp!"

The orderly, looking puzzled, made a brave attempt at dissembling. Noting his dilemma, Lew-chee whispered a word to him, whereupon he again approached the Colonel.

"You write?" said the latter again, fixing Lew-chee searchingly.

"A little," replied the youth modestly.

"Bring pen and ink!" ordered Wong.

These were produced—the usual tiny brush, prepared ink in a small brass box, and some thin paper.

The despatch was brief, simply an order to the new contingent to join a certain captain in the line. The Colonel drew out his small personal seal, dipped it deftly in the soft red putty which passed for wax and affixed it to the despatch.

Lew-chee saluted and turned to depart. Just then a clatter of hoofs was heard outside the inn and a rider flinging himself to the ground advanced in haste. At-

tending with but brief preliminaries his despatch was in Wong's hands and its contents quickly comprehended.

The Colonel threw down his cards and rose with alacrity.

"The game's over!" he remarked laconically to his officers. They rose. "The other game is on!"

"Where's that writer fellow? Call him back!" he ordered tersely.

Lew-chee wondering what the new despatch might mean, had not departed from the inn. He came forward quickly and awaited orders.

"Here," said the Colonel briefly, "write again."

The despatch-rider had brought a most urgent message from General Chang. He was hard pressed and must have help immediately. Wong must tarry no longer in reorganizing his regiment, but attack the enemy's left flank with all vigour.

Wong gave a significant look at his officers and said something in a low tone about "the old man being on the stage and unable to get off." But with the aid of Lew-chee he wrote, "Advancing immediately. Wong," sealing the words with his personal seal.

The despatch-rider departed hastily, and Lew-chee prepared also to leave. But the Colonel halted him.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Lew is my unworthy name, sire."

"Then report to me tomorrow, Lew! Meanwhile hurry those men up."

As Lew-chee hurried forth, the Colonel and his men left the table and began issuing orders.

An hour later the youth found his squad sauntering along lazily awaiting his return. The news he brought them seemed satisfying. They would get a little

closer to their place in the line and await developments. This they proceeded to do, marching around the village where the Colonel was now known to be, so that they might not become too intimately involved in the action.

The Colonel had evidently acted promptly. Inquiring their way from stragglers, his men found that their regiment had gone forward rapidly and were probably already engaged. Closer still they pressed, the noise of battle now bearing full upon them. The prevailing excitement had a tremendous effect on Lew-chee, and he was most anxious to be in the fray. Possibly a dim consciousness that his sweetheart's father was in danger also nerved him on. But his comrades were more cautious. By dint of further inquiry they found their assigned captain's whereabouts, and felt about cautiously as to how the battle fared. Reports were excellent, and after a few more delays they were well forward in the fray.

Colonel Wong's attack was a surprise to the enemy. The intelligence they had of his regiment was that it was too disorganized for effective service and they had left their flank exposed. Moreover, Wong's men were fresh, and when the enemy gave way they went forward with rare vigour. It was nearly noon when fighting started and they drove back the foe steadily until the evening. As for Lew-chee, being in his first fight engendered a strange fear which almost overpowered him, but there was also within him a wild sense of triumph. He wanted to rush forward and engage his foes face to face. He found, however, that that was not the procedure followed in such battles as this. For the most part, the men remained hidden, firing away indiscriminately at a supposed mass of the

hidden foe. Then, when no firing issued from that quarter, indicating that the enemy had apparently fled, a few of them crept forward cautiously and the rest followed. It was a game of hide-and-seek, with incessant firing to say his side were coming. Not that there were no killed or wounded, there *were* casualties, but they were but few in view of the quantity of ammunition expended.

Shortly after darkness had set in, word was passed that the enemy were in full retreat. Every man was in an instant advancing furiously. It was not merely a case of striking the foe as he fled. Much more urgent than that was the necessity of being the first to enter towns and cities in the conquered territory. That meant a chance for pillage to have its perfect work. About midnight they came upon a large city and some of the men were for entering, as it was known that the enemy had passed by it. But other regiments under General Chang's command were surrounding the place. So Wong's troops left for less-hampered fields. Thirty miles further on they knew there was another wealthy city. They had fair hopes of being first there. Moreover, by being well in advance of the main body of troops, they would avoid the irksomeness of the General's discipline which, for their purpose, was altogether too severe.

XIV

LOOT

ABOUT ten o'clock on the following morning they reached their destination. There was no sign of the enemy who had made a hurried retreat. The big city gates were closed. Men of the local militia bands, clerks, coolies and artisans surrounded the walls. As ordered, Lew-chee found out the Colonel and reported, but was scarcely noticed. The great man was too busied with other things. Lew-chee understood and waited.

"Surround the city," ordered Wong, "and especially hold each gate in force." Others he sent forward to demand unconditional surrender.

A little later a white flag, followed almost immediately by another of a foreign nation, appeared above the crest of the wall. A small group which included a foreign missionary desiring to parley. The idea of having a foreign missionary to be spokesman in an attempt to save a city was not new. To whom else could the unfortunate inhabitants appeal in their distress? Indeed, in certain cases it had undoubtedly been of benefit both to the besiegers and the besieged. This nearly always depended on the character of the former. If the investing force was composed of men of character, such as General Chang was well known to be, then the officer's word was as good as his bond; and woe to the soldiers, or even officers, who dared to oppress the populace. A firing squad in some en-

campment, or a number of heads hung up by the ears in certain gateways gave evidence that orders given in such instances were meant to be obeyed.

Of Wong and his regiment the people of the city knew nothing. Of General Chang and his reputation, they knew much. It was with hopeful expectancy, therefore, that having got rid of one force which was ever demanding loans never to be repaid, they saw some of the General's force outside their walls. Accordingly they had sent some of their most prominent citizens, including their civil magistrate, to the better known of two foreign pastors who lived in their city, requesting that he act as mediator in the matter.

The worthy missionary who lived in this city was Thomas Mathewson, a man, big both of body and heart, but of limited experience and little education. Ten years previously, he had been a butcher's assistant in a small city in his homeland, had had a somewhat boisterous conversion in a series of revival services, and later had blossomed forth as a local preacher of his sect. He became a real power for good among his acquaintances and associates. His strong voice and earnest, if ungrammatical words, could and did turn many from waywardness to righteous living. Filled with a real zeal for the conversion of his fellows, he applied to a certain missionary society for service on the foreign field, and in the course of another year found himself out in the great land of China. As the custom is, they gave him a Chinese name approximating his own, namely "Ma,"—meaning "horse"—set him to study the language, and, after a time, appointed him to a station. Owing to age and a lack of the power of application, he had made but little progress in the language; but his warm

heart and a conspicuous credulity soon won for him a considerable popularity. He exhorted the heathen about him, in season and out of season, and regularly reported many conversions to his home church.

Things being as they were, Ma had not had much contact with the gentry of the place. He had met the magistrate on different occasions, but usually it had been over cases in which some of his membership had led him to believe they were suffering persecution, and he had gone to be their spokesman. He was agreeably surprised, therefore, when he was told this day that the magistrate and a few of the leading citizens were anxious to call upon him. When it transpired that they wanted his assistance in arranging terms with the enemy, he felt genuinely grateful to be thought worthy of such a service, and readily assented. It was not to be expected that a man of his guileless calibre should suspect that they wished only to use him as a shield for protection while they themselves took the measure of their besiegers. Such, however, was really the case.

The flags of truce appeared upon the wall. Then the peace party appeared. As might have been expected, the tall missionary was the most prominent. A suitable rope was fastened noose-like beneath his arms and he was lowered down the wall. With his long legs he shoved vigorously to push himself out from the surface of the wall.

"Foreign baby!" sneered the Colonel as he watched the proceedings. "Who is with him?"

"Probably the magistrate!" remarked one of his wily followers.

A few minutes later and the peace envoys ap-

proached. The Colonel and his officers sat at a table in a nearby tea shop. The foreigner was greeted with apparent cordiality, the Chinese with severe dignity. These relations were maintained throughout the interview. For the first time Lew-chee noticed something he observed quite frequently later, namely, a small but subtle move on the part of the wily Colonel toward visitors. He seated Pastor Ma on his right hand, though the left is the customary place of honour in China. This, Lew-chee concluded, was in order that he might smile upon the unsuspecting foreigner with an unmarred face, while the magistrate and his party might get the full benefit of the sinister glare from his drawn eye and deformed cheek.

The negotiations did not last long. The representatives of the besieged had come to ask that their city might be protected from plunder. They could not say such a thing themselves, but the foreigner might say it openly. This Pastor Ma proceeded to do, with little hesitation. He had scarce begun his request, when the apparently magnanimous Colonel cordially anticipated his thought.

"Certainly, certainly. Of course, of course," he broke in, turning his suavest smile toward the pastor. "The shepherd-scholar's heart is very tender. Yes, yes. I also know much of the Gospel. Love your neighbor as yourself. Certainly. Naturally. The pastor knows well our unhappy country. No, no! My men are not as the enemy. They are true soldiers. They come to protect the people. Let the pastor rest his heart in peace."

"The Colonel will guarantee protection?" the pastor asked again, not quite following all the officer's euphemisms.

"Absolutely," answered the latter, pretending to a half-indignant surprise that any suspicion should attach itself to this assurance of safety he had given.

"The Colonel gives his absolute guarantee," repeated the pastor to his Chinese friends, smiling delightedly.

"Of course," added the Colonel glaring at the magistrate with his disfigured eye, "it may be necessary to search some sections for secreted enemy and weapons."

The delegation was inclined to demur at the latter assertion. It would be too ready an excuse for excess. The citizens had authorized the pastor, when outlining their negotiations, to offer a certain sum to Colonel Wong on condition that his troops remain outside the walls. They knew these men in a way the unsuspecting pastor did not. They even attempted to say a few words for themselves. But the Colonel was grimly silent. He again smiled benignly upon the pastor. The latter thought him a most reasonable, cordial man; one, indeed, who could even quote Scripture. How could one further question him? He rose to go. The magistrate and his men attempted to persuade him to return. But he was jubilant. He had saved the city. They must trust the Colonel. He even suggested that the gates be opened at once, and was rather indignant that they should consider it necessary that the peace delegation be hauled back over the wall.

Late that afternoon the gates were flung open and a band of citizens with yards of red bunting as sign of congratulation and welcome came forth to usher in the victors. A little later and Colonel Wong and his regiment entered, followed by bands of suspicious-

looking characters who, apparently, had sprung up from nowhere. But everything was quiet and orderly. The Colonel, with his bodyguard, went to the Yamen of the magistrate, while his soldiers quartered themselves in various temples. The riff-raff seemed lost in the many streets. The pastor's members came to congratulate him upon his bravery and skill, and, incidentally, to hear the full details of his interview with Colonel Wong. Quite naturally Ma was very happy and communicative. That evening he began a long communication to his home constituency, telling of the day's wonderful proceedings and of how providentially he had been used for the salvation of the city.

But he never finished that letter. That night, shortly after darkness fell, pandemonium began to reign throughout the city. Cries, shouting, shooting, fires, were everywhere. Crowds of unfortunates burst through his gateway and clambered over his compound walls seeking a place of refuge. Men and women, young girls, little children ran hither and thither. They crowded into every nook and corner of his church, his house, his cow-stable, dragging with them small bundles of clothing and valuables, hiding, weeping piteously for lost partners or parents, hysterically calling out for they knew not what—a terror-stricken mass of poor humanity!

Lew-chee found himself rushing here and there. The lust of loot had seized him also, and he gave full reign to its passion. He soon discovered that the looters were not all soldiers. The riff-raff who had followed them into the town were equally busy, and numbers of the poor of the place were also eagerly engaged in robbing their fellow-citizens. These having little to lose and possessing the additional advantage

of knowing the homes and shops of the well-to-do, were constantly being used as guides. An officer with a small guard was detained in the Yamen to take charge of the loot as it arrived, but even the Colonel and his chiefs of staff were out somewhere, "engaged in the search for hidden enemy and arms." Almost the first rush had been with a view to seize the magistrate, but he had taken early warning and fled, no one knew whither. His house and all its contents were thoroughly "searched" and everything of value seized.

A certain rough good humour seemed to prevail among the looters. They were out on a real holiday, reaping a bountiful harvest. How could they do otherwise than coöperate with comrades? The soldiers usually had the preference, of course, for they had the rather formidable argument of superior arms. But, on the whole, there was little serious conflict. Why lose time squabbling while there were so many helpless and fine "fat pigs" to be eaten? Lew-chee, sometimes with comrades, sometimes alone, broke open shop-fronts with the butt of his rifle, ravaging about recklessly for clothing, trinkets, and silver, especially the latter. At times he ran into a home only to find the place already stripped bare, with a few huddled figures crouched terror-stricken in some out-house, well-nigh naked. Best of all good fortune was to come across some big, black door with its gods glaring down and the inside securely bolted. The latter was a sign that the pasture within was still green. There would be much food for the hungry. Here a few shots from his rifle, added to the usual hammering with his rifle-butt, usually secured a speedy opening. Some timid old servant generally performed the latter

feat, only to fall upon his face and plead for mercy. Like the magistrate, the owner had usually flown with his family, leaving his possessions behind him. Large numbers of the well-to-do were content to mingle among the peasants clad in the poorest raiment in order that life, and freedom from capture and torture, might be secured.

Thus the night wore on. Lew-chee returned more than once to the Yamen to place his burden of loot in custody. His big supple body carried him to and fro with a fine stride, and he felt a wild sense of gloating satisfaction as he thought of the big pile placed to his credit. He had not taken trouble to think how it was to be used. The question of the moment was to rush about ruthlessly and grab, pillage and plunder. That even he had not paused to debate with himself his newly found philosophy. Everybody seemed to be possessed of it from the Colonel down. Loot was lord. Loot was life! Away with pity! Plunder! Loot!

A few moments later, however, and Lew-chee *did* pause. He was running along alone, near the entrance to a big compound, when he heard an unusual riot within. Some one was crying piteously for help. Cries were certainly nothing new *that* night, but these plaintive women's voices touched something in Lew-chee's being that had remained untouched all through the looting. His feet seemed to carry him into the place before he could question his motives for his action. There a disgusting sight met his eyes. Half-a-dozen villainous-looking rascals, evidently riff-raff, but wearing soldiers' uniforms, were dragging three young women from the place. An old, gray-haired man was lying in the courtyard, either stunned or done

to death. Two elderly women, their hair dishevelled, were clinging to the desperadoes' garments and shouting frantically. The younger women were weeping and struggling desperately.

Lew-chee made an involuntary stride forward, then paused again.

"Why should I interfere?" he said to himself. "It is desire against desire, will against will, strength pitted against strength, and that is the sum of life! Dozens of women are being dragged out of their houses tonight, why should I protect these? Why should I act the fool? Why should I risk my skin with such odds against me and for mere strangers? Women? Pah!"

He turned on his heel to go. As he did so one big fellow with a brutal face tore himself free from one of the elderly women and with a savage blow sent her spinning to the stone courtyard below. Lew-chee whirled about. Why, he could not tell. Was it the memory of a mother lying by a burned cabin, long ago? Was it little Mae Jen warm by his side on the verge of the precipice? Was it some primitive pulsation of pity? Possibly. Memory could scarcely move with such lightning speed. With a hoarse growl he sprang among the marauders, laying about him with his rifle-butt, with awful accuracy. Four of the number ran howling from the compound. Another blow and a fifth crawled away on all fours. The big fellow who had struck down the woman alone remained. He drew a long well-ground blade and stood ready for Lew. A couple of great teeth protruding through a hare-lip seemed to grin at his opponent in mock derision. They did so only for a moment. Their owner was no match for the furnace-like fury that raged in

Lew-chee's soul. A slight wrist wound was all he received in the struggle. The ruffian was beaten down and his knife wrenched from him in a trice. Lew-chee laid into him with his feet until his own strength gave out, when he ceased from sheer exhaustion.

A moment or so later he returned as it were, from some unknown depths. The man still lay at his feet, groaning heavily. An elderly woman was bowing before him uttering protestations of gratefulness. The other elderly woman had apparently been carried, or had crawled away. The younger women had fled. The old man still lay there apparently lifeless. Slowly a realization of the whole scene returned to him. He drew back his foot to give the ruffian on the ground another kick, but suddenly refrained. He waved the old woman away and staggering to the entrance of the place, leaned weakly against one of the great doors. What had happened? What strange power had seized him? He had never known such overpowering passion before. Were the Taoists right, and had some demon temporarily possessed him? Should he go back and apologize to that fellow there, help him to his feet and examine his wounds? No; another rush of inexplicable passion seemed ready to well up within him as the scene rose before him. He half turned to again enter the place and rush on the prostrate form of the man he had felled. Then he recovered himself and walked slowly back to the Yamen.

It was near the dawning of another day as he passed the great outer gates. Entering, he found everything topsy-turvy. Huge bundles of loot were scattered about, and odds and ends of valuables lay at his feet as he went forward. He did not stoop to pick them up. They seemed to have lost interest for him. He

found his way to his own pile, and paying little attention to the contents, seized a big wadded quilt which was a part of the booty and lay down. Although wearied, he could only doze dreamily; sound sleep evaded him. His weakness gradually passed, but the memory of the strange frenzy was still with him. He had assuredly done those things in that compound, and yet it was not he. Some power not his own had taken possession of him.

"Surely the Taoists are right," he thought half-consciously. "Devils can possess people and sway them to their will. What strange beings we are! Who can tell when we act on our own volition, and when at the dictate of some devil dwelling within us?"

Then his half-dreams were cut short. Some one was rousing him. A soldier stood over him.

"You wanted by the Colonel," the man said, "to assist in listing the loot." Rising quickly to his feet, Lew pulled himself together, and followed into an inner room of the Yamen. There he found the Colonel and some of his officers stretched out, smoking opium. They were apparently very much at ease and well pleased with the night's work. Loads of loot, especially of silver, were being carried into the room.

"This," said the Colonel, "is for the payment of the troops, so must be given over to the officers. The remainder can be divided among squads or kept privately."

Lew-chee was ordered to aid in checking off the amounts as they arrived. Colonel Wong, he noted, lay with his smiling cheek uppermost that morning and chuckled frequently to his comrades. None the less, he apparently kept a careful mental account of the

dollars, cash and lumps of silver that went into his treasury.

Presently there was a slight commotion. Pastor Ma's card was brought in by a soldier who announced that the pastor himself was following close behind, highly indignant. Wong scarcely stirred from his comfortable position.

"Tell him I'm not in," he ordered caustically. "Say that I am out looking up the culprits of last night's affray." Then he took another puff at his pipe. After a moment's pause he spoke to his orderly.

"Call the head of the guard," he drawled. The latter appeared speedily.

"There was some trouble on the street last night," he said cryptically.

The officer made no reply.

"See that a few heads come off and are paraded through the street," he continued, "but be careful that the heads are unimportant."

The guard-captain departed on his mission of mercy. Later in the day the heads of a few unfortunate coolies were prominently exhibited. A proclamation, done in Lew-chee's best-written characters, was also widely distributed. One was especially posted at the door of the Gospel Hall of Pastor Ma. It recited the promise given for the protection of the city, and bewailed the fact that there had been a "small" disturbance on "some" streets. It laid the blame for the affair on the bad characters among the local militia and ordered that their arms be handed over immediately to the proper authorities. A "loan" would also be raised at once for the aid of the sufferers, and the merchants and gentry were ordered to send their representatives

to confer with the military authorities that same afternoon.

Having finished these arduous tasks and his smoke, Wong, with one or two other officers retired to another part of the Yamen. Lew-chee heard echoes of drinking, gambling and women's voices. His services were not required. He again retired to his wadded quilt, and finally fell into an uneasy sleep, disturbed by strange, half-formed queries and phantasies of the mind.

XV

PASTOR MA

THE days that followed were days of much perplexity to Lew-chee. The already badly-plundered people of the city were commanded, through their representatives, to produce food, bedding and a large money loan. Should they fail to comply, "how could the troops be restrained?" Farmers from the outlying country were constantly petitioning through their headmen to have robbery repressed. Homes were being burned, people and pigs indiscriminately carried off, the unfortunate farmers and their families often compelled to sleep in the fields and on the hillsides, not daring to be found in their own dwellings at night. Lew-chee, who was behind the scenes, knew well that all this was instigated by or connived at by Colonel Wong and his rascally crowd. The whole regiment was largely one of bandits. Robber-leaders were Wong's officers, or else came and went openly paying, in men or money, for their nefarious privileges. When some unfortunate section of the surrounding district appeared to be ready to rise in arms by reason of the oppression, a company of soldiers was sent ostensibly for "protection," but in reality to pillage the neighbourhood all the more mercilessly. Indeed, the farmers were encouraged to buy arms for the local militia in order to have the latter accused of disorder and divested of their weapons, or commandeered into the army. As for the landowners, they were ordered to pay taxes

first three, then four, then five years in advance of the date of their being due.

Lew-chee was an unwilling beholder and, at times, a participant in all this. His philosophy of the world as a war of desires had been sadly shaken. He had broken with the belief that desires, as the Buddha had urged, should be destroyed, annihilated. That, while life lasted, was impossible. Indeed, as he knew, from his fight with the dogs, the rats, the ravens, and the river, they would not *let* man die, even when reason approved one's exit. Then he had decided that desire should dominate all, to let "the lust of life be lord." Had he succeeded? No. He had yielded to the old woman one of his shining dollars. He had saved the militia man in the field and the carrier on the journey. Now he had rushed like a mad man to the fight for some women he had never seen, would never see again, had risked his life, for what? Who could tell? What madness! The best explanation of his own life and of the wild, conflicting lusts about him was that all men were mad. As the Taoists taught, they were possessed with demons.

"Demons rule the world," concluded Lew. "They use diseases and dogs, plagues and people, alike, for their pleasure. The world is but a plaything of these powers of evil. Men are powerless against such odds. If there are gods, then they are easily hoodwinked, endlessly idle or asleep in their palaces. Our old Chinese proverb is abundantly true: 'The big fish gobbled up the little fish and the little fish ate the shrimps.' There ought to be a clause added to that," thought Lew with a cynical chuckle—"in the end the devils devour all."

In these times of despondency he thought often of

Mae Jen and her sweet, young life. She at least seemed to contradict his pessimism. Surely, she was sane. She was not possessed of demons as he, himself, and others were. Her desires assuredly led to fulness of life. Ah, there it was again, that phrase she had taught him! That was a goal worth winning. Blessed be the desires that led to such an end—this fulness of life, as he had seen it in Mae Jen, his Mae Jen! Had he not felt it bursting forth in boundless energy even in himself, giving him strength to rescue her from the temple, to cross with her upon the swaying cable, to descend the precipice, to fight for the raft? And for her! What memories! But now? Now, she was gone—gone? And where? Who knew? Ah, the bitterness of those memories! Here was further evidence of his latest theory.

"The Taoists are right," cried Lew again, as his innermost feelings cried aloud for utterance. "Devils are everywhere; marring if not manipulating everything. Is it not clear? Even Mae Jen's full-blown beauty of soul and body is but a trick, preparatory to more exquisite torment. Life in its fulness is but a frolic of devils—a delicious delusion with which to tantalize mortals, irrevocably doomed to death!"

Yet, it had been a most wonderful dream while it lasted. What a world it would be with women such as she, and men worthy of her! He could not wholly shake off the wish that, somehow, it might be so. Here again was an irrepressible desire, he told himself, and he wondered what it might mean? Where could he go for light? It was useless to look to Colonel Wong and his gang of freebooters. They, of all men, only "knew lust as lord."

Mae Jen and her mother were Christians. Why

should he not go to the Christian chapel and listen? This Pastor Ma might have some solution of life's perplexities to offer. The Christian preacher in Lew's native city had little to offer, he knew; but then he was but a Chinese convert. Surely the foreigner himself would have something better. On enquiry he found that Pastor Ma held services almost every evening in a small shop on a side street. Lew-chee's first visit to hear Pastor Ma preach brought him but little comfort. The speaker did not lack for zeal. His voice at times was almost a roar as his face reddened with emotion. On such occasions few could understand his rather confused Chinese, yet, at the same time, few could doubt his sincerity. But it was his theme that gave Lew-chee such little satisfaction. It was almost wholly concerned with some temple built by a certain King Solomon, winding up with an exhortation that all accept Jesus and be saved. The youth went back to his wadded quilts doubting whether the temple was as large as that in his own native town, and wondering even more as to the connection between the long discourse and its conclusion.

The two following nights were similarly disappointing. On the first, Pastor Ma spent most of the time telling of a fight between a young shepherd named David and a giant called Goliath. On the second, those present were told of a great flood which destroyed all men living except a man named Noah and his family. Attached to each discourse was a sudden and disconnected appeal for belief in Jesus. Lew-chee failed to see why. He found the stories interesting, however, and at the close bought a Bible from the pastor. Returning home he whiled away the long, hot night, while others were gambling about him, in reading

the stories of the men of whom he had heard. He was not a little shocked to find that, even according to the record, in the book itself, these worthies exhibited very questionable conduct. How could Pastor Ma connect such sinners with a Saviour of the world?

Still, the youth was interested, and went to the Christian service again. He listened to a story he had heard before, of the first man and woman and their expulsion from a garden. He thought, as he followed the story and heard such expressions as "the tree of life" and "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," together with the story of the serpent talking, that there surely must be something allegorical about it all. He even dared to ask Pastor Ma at the close of the service if such might not be so? The latter became very warm on the subject and assured him that it was all literally true, that to doubt a single sentence was to utterly dishonour God and become an outright child of Satan.

Even the statement that the serpent was really Satan was literally true, the pastor averred.

"Then devils can assume the shapes of animals and talk with people?" Lew-chee asked. The pastor agreed. The youth mentally noted that the Taoists also so taught.

"And the devil can tempt people, deceive people, conquer people, and cause all manner of evil in the world?" pursued Lew.

"Exactly, exactly!" glowed the pastor, delighted at so intelligent an inquirer. "All the evil in the world is due to the devil and his angels. Through him our first parents fell, and ever since he has been going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour."

"Then the devils are stronger than men?" continued his inquirer.

"Yes," agreed the pastor, "they can always defeat us if we are unaided."

"Unaided?" questioned the youth. "Who can aid us against such foes?"

"Jesus, my boy!" cried the big man fervently. "He alone can aid us against such powers of evil. He alone can save!"

"Then why does He not drive the devils out of my people?" queried the youth earnestly.

"Simply because they do not ask Him," came the answer quickly and decidedly.

"Need we do nothing, ourselves?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing, save ask Jesus. All human efforts are worse than useless. You must simply trust Him, pray to Him, ask Him. That is all."

Then Pastor Ma told him of many instances of sickness caused by devils, of how Jesus had driven these out and the sick were made well instantly; of deaf and dumb and insane people suddenly made whole; of a woman out of whom He had cast seven devils, and of the fact that Jesus, Himself, had been tempted by the devil for forty days, but had come out conqueror.

Lew-chee bowed, and made ready to depart. The pastor urged him to return and learn more of the truth. The youth promised to do so. The pastor told his wife with much rejoicing, of another soldier finding light. The youth returned to his place in the lower rooms of the Yamen to ponder far into the night while the crowd outside gambled, cursed, fought and drank.

"Sin and sorrow and sickness are everywhere in the world," he meditated. "The Buddha has said that these were caused by our desires, and that we were to

suppress such and utterly destroy them. But that I had tried to do and have failed. Now the Christians are teaching that all disease and disaster, even death, are caused by devils. With that doctrine the Sorcerers and Taoists agree. These claimed to cast out devils by means of magic swords, brushes, and chants, or by calling on the power of the god of Thunder or the Pearly Emperor. But they have failed. They have been trying for hundreds, aye, thousands of years in my land and have failed. Now the Christians have come and declare that they have secured the secret. Jesus can destroy the devils and that without any help or effort of men. Only ask. Surely nothing can be simpler. I will try." He prayed as best he knew how, far into the night until even the day again dawned. He prayed that the devils might be driven out of the soldiers, the robbers, the wicked of the land. He continued his prayers silently as he went about his work the following day. He prayed that the devils might depart from the officers that sat about carousing, that especially they might depart from the Colonel, as he wrote down for him nefarious proclamations and answered his letters.

Now and then he looked about him to see if he could note any difference in the appearance of things or men. He regretted he could see none. He tried to picture to himself what must happen. Was Jesus casting out the devils as he prayed? That was what the pastor had promised. What became of them? He wished he might know the process. The Sorcerers caught them and put them in crocks, covering the latter carefully with many colours of cloth to prevent their escape. The Taoists said they could see them at times, as whiffs of smoke. That all seemed very crude,

but had not the Christian pastor insisted that the devil might be found in the form of a snake? He looked about him as he went on praying, to see if he discover any such appearance silently gliding away. But he could see none. The riot and revelry went wildly on as before.

Jesus, and even His disciples by using His name, had cast out many devils from the sick and healed them, the pastor had said. He would go forth into the streets and test the matter. There would be plenty of beggars there. For a time he walked about irresolute. There was not a street but that presented a view of some of these unfortunates. The blind, the lame, the deformed were all represented. Bodies loathsome with sores; heads with hair clotted and unsightly scabs; children crying out piteously for food; poor, old gray-haired, half-naked women borne on the back of a supposed son; an unfortunate with both feet gone who hunched his way down the middle of the street on his hips; a half-dozen skeletons stretched out on bits of straw or matting begging for the burnt rice in the bottom of the pot. What sights! And all this was the work of devils and Jesus had made such whole. He could do the same by simply asking. He hesitated no longer. Going from place to place, he paused to breathe his prayer. To some of the more piteous, he returned twice, even thrice; yet could detect no difference in them, as a result of his prayers. Most of them simply withdrew from him in fear on seeing his soldier's uniform, while the more emboldened cried out clamorously for "cash, cash, cash." Crestfallen, he returned to his room. Either he had failed, or Jesus had failed him. He spent the night in sore doubt and deep perplexity.

He did not return to the pastor for some days. What could be the use? But passing the chapel door one Sunday, he noticed several people entering and he wandered in. He had attended only the preaching in the shops, and felt he would like to see what their real "Gospel Hall" might contain. Pastor Ma and others of the foreign families were present. A stranger led in prayer, the sentiment of it being similar to that which he had heard before. People were in sin everywhere. The devil was seeking to possess them, to gather them all into hell. Jesus was ready to save all mankind. People had but to ask Him. Lew-chee listened hopelessly. Jesus had failed him. If He could not cast out devils in this world, why trouble about the next? Apparently the devils had everything. Jesus either could not, or would not help.

He became more interested, however, when a foreign woman began to make strange noises from a large box behind which she sat. He would have liked to have gone forward and examined the thing. He was annoyed that the people began to raise their voices and drown out the notes which appealed to him as unusually sweet and solemn. He had many times whiled away the time in the old temple, playing upon his small, two-stringed violin. This music was stronger, more sonorous. He listened to catch its cadences amid the general clash of voices each following its own time and tune. Then all sat down and he followed their example, still held by the spell of the music.

He was aroused by someone pushing a small box before his face. He had not seen a collection-box before and drew back with a start. A man held it by a long handle. Then a stranger whispered that a contribution was wanted. He quickly produced a small

coin. The man at the end of the handle withdrew the box and gave the youth a strange smile. What was it in that look that was peculiar? Lew-chee looked again. He followed the face and figure as the man went on with the collection. There was something familiar about both. The man limped a little, but that gave no clue. He had a cleft lip, but that was a sight common enough. The man having completed his task, carried the contents of the box to the pastor, who stood upon the platform. The latter received the contributions with some words of prayer or praise. The collection-taker was evidently a man of some position and prominence in the church. As he came again to his seat, Lew-chee watched him and noticed that the man was also evidently looking for him. But that must be a delusion. He was a stranger. How could he know anyone in this place, especially a Christian in Pastor Ma's church? Yet the man's face and form would not leave his memory.

He heard little of the discourse. He kept gazing at the head and hulking form of the church official. The service ended, he noticed the man rise hurriedly and go to the rear of the church. As Lew-chee approached the door, he noted the man again, the centre of a small group. But the smile had departed from his grinning, exposed tooth. It now stood out like a fang in the face of a demon. Like a flash, recollection came back to Lew-chee. He saw again a courtyard, an old man lying dying, three weeping women being dragged forward by a group of blackguards, then a fight, and this face flaming furiously in hate before him.

Again Lew-chee felt a wild impulse to spring upon him. He reached involuntarily for his side-arms, only to discover that he was without them. The group

began to close in about him, to jostle him to one side and out upon the street. Evidently they did not wish to have a scene in the church.

"Nice to meet you again," sneered one.

"Your luck is good today," continued another.

"Come over to the tea-house and let us drink a cup together," added a third.

Lew-chee, well understanding their design, made a bolt to the right. The men immediately seized him and began to drag him forward. A struggle was soon in full progress. Others came to aid the official and his gang, and the odds were against the youth. But Lew-chee's mountain breeding and agility, together with his large limbs, made the fight fast and furious. A big crowd gathered and blocking the narrow street, watched the struggle with evident unconcern. Then the collection-taker, watching his chance, sprang at the youth from behind, and seizing him about the neck, dragged him down. Others of the gang jumped upon him and began to beat him furiously.

Just then, Pastor Ma appeared. The sound of the tumult before his church-door had attracted his attention. He was astounded! What could it mean? Here were his deacon and some of his prominent members attacking a soldier, and that soldier the youth who had come to him with such earnest questions a few nights previously!

Brushing aside the bystanders, he was in the centre of the ring in a moment, hurtling the contestants right and left with his powerful arms. He had never, as had another illustrious missionary, fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, but in his unregenerate days he had struggled many a time with bulls and bullies, and something of the spirit of the old days inspired his

movements. Safe to say, his church members had never before experienced the personal touch of their pastor from such an angle. They stood amazed and subdued before him. Lew-chee, released, rose quickly to his feet and noting his rescuer still engaged, sprang again into the fray, sending the deacon spinning with a well-aimed blow. But the big pastor soon had the youth also in his powerful grip and the struggle came to an end.

But Pastor Ma was not yet through. He pulled his deacon to his feet and, confronting him with the youth, demanded an explanation.

"That's a bad man," panted the deacon. "He's a soldier, a robber, a very bad man."

"Yes, a very bad man," echoed some of the others of the band.

"On the night of the looting," continued the dishevelled official, "we found him in one of our Christian homes, looting and chasing our women."

Lew-chee's arm shot out again and instantaneously the long tooth of the deacon took on a scarlet colour. At the same time he himself received an ugly wrench from the militant pastor.

"Bring these fellows into your church and I'll face them all," Lew-chee said. "I have no wish to make a scene here on the street."

But the deacon and his band had other intentions. As Pastor Ma, readily assenting to Lew's proposal, began to move toward the door, the deacon suddenly stooped down, twisted himself from his pastor's grasp, and made off, the rest of the gang following.

"We'll meet again," he cried, evincing his hate for Lew with hideous grimace.

The youth made no reply. Pastor Ma tried to draw

him into the church but he refused. Raising himself to his full height, he said to the crowd: "Fetch those blacklegs any time and I will willingly go with them to a home on a certain street, and then you can hear the truth. And the pastor may also inquire there," he added, turning to the latter. Then he bowed and took his departure.

Making his way along certain side-streets in order to hide his rather dishevelled appearance, he proceeded to the Yamen and his room. He was not aware that he was followed. It was well, perhaps, that he was not, for other troubles from a different quarter awaited him.

XVI

A BETROTHAL

IT was not without reason that Lew-chee had especially prayed that the devils might be cast out of Colonel Wong and his officers. By degrees he had become only too well aware that few were so fully possessed as they. If, as he now understood the Christian doctrine from Pastor Ma's teaching, all the sin, the sickness and squalor of the world were caused by devils and that Jesus alone could overcome them and cast them out, then surely this group was the place to commence the crusade.

He had early learned that not only was the looting done with their connivance, but was actually a part of a settled plan of action. They received their full share of the spoils, and had actually assisted at many sinister scenes, in disguise. He knew also that the systematic plunder of the countryside was all being done under their guidance. To Wong and his subordinates heads of robber-bands reported regularly the progress of their plans. He was aghast, however, one day, to hear The Feathered Hen named and to learn that he, too, was prominent in the nefarious work. Position, power, wealth, women, wassail, that was their world.

As time went on, these men seemed to forget or ignore Lew-chee's presence. Possibly they presumed he was one with them at heart. More probably they did not care. What did it matter what the fellow who sat and wrote their letters, was thinking about? What

power had he? So as he copied out their messages, they continued their pitiless programs. At first he did not care, and often listened little to their talk. But the mention of The Feathered Hen roused him to sudden antagonism. How could he be other than an enemy to men who were associates of such a villain? Thoughts of The Tiger which had long lain slumbering awakened within him, and demanded satisfaction and revenge. A father murdered, a mother dead, a sister lost! Who could associate calmly with the accomplices of such criminals?

One day a letter came from General Chang in which he praised Colonel Wong and his regiment for the good work done in the recent fight. It closed by cordially inviting all to visit headquarters in order that they might receive fitting reward and honour. To Lew-chee's surprise the message was received with much sneering on the part of the staff and open cursing on the part of the Colonel. The conversation that followed was even more astonishing. It was evident that these men had no loyalty either to their commander or his cause. They had purposely feigned defeat for days in the recent encounter, that they might the better assemble toward its close, deal the last blow if there was a chance of winning, thus securing prestige and plunder, or make good their escape if all were lost. The plan had worked well. They had won, and now what they had schemed for had come to pass. The General was to give them high honour and doubtless a goodly gift in prize-money.

So the officers chuckled jeeringly at the triumph of their treachery. They would go to the old fellow's show, swagger finely before their fellows, and insist on big sums as their special reward for courage. Ha!

Ha! Then the Colonel cursed again. He would not go. Old "Soft Ears" would have to be master in his own family before he would salute him again. What that implied, Lew-chee could not gather from the conversation. But evidently the officers knew, and after much pleading, persuaded their chief to alter his mind. So the Colonel and his staff, accompanied by a fitting escort, rode over to headquarters, remained there a few days and returned. They came back in high dudgeon, although they had evidently been well honoured and most liberally rewarded. The Colonel was most violent in his rage, and his spirit infected the rest of his band.

Among the officers the cause of the trouble was no longer a matter for deferential discussion. It was spoken of openly. The Colonel had been insulted, treated like a dog. Old Chang had promised that he should have his daughter in marriage, but had twice deferred the matter as the mother and daughter were opposed to the union, and now the old "softie" had again pleaded the same excuse. But the promise had been given, the eight characters had been exchanged, and the lowest muckraker in the land would claim fulfilment. No wretched coolie, much less the Colonel of a regiment could stand such an insult. It must be avenged. If the old craven could not control his own women, then they would show him how! Thus they clamoured before their chief, while he at times stamped about wild with rage or else threw himself down upon his bed, refusing to be comforted.

To Lew-chee this revelation came like a bolt from the blue. He excused himself because of a faintness that was apparent to all, and stumbled off to his room to recover.

"What can it mean?" he said to himself. "Was this murderous villain with his loot and lust and limitless cruelty engaged to the old general's daughter? What daughter? An elder sister of my own sweet Mae Jen no doubt. Well, thank the gods or the devils or whoever is running the world that it is not Mae Jen herself. She is dead and far better that she is than linked to a living fiend."

Alas, for the unfortunate elder sister! What could she know to cause her and her mother to object? Was she like the dear dead little sister, pure, wise, winsome? If so, the cause could be easily surmised. How could he allow even his loved one's sister to meet such a fate? How could he be loyal in his love to Mae Jen and allow her sister to so suffer? In memory even now he could see Mae Jen's deep, dark, searching eyes upon him. No, he could never meet those eyes again, even in memory, and allow such a crime. In his heart he swore eternal loyalty to his dead, and strong in that spirit went quietly back to his task. The Colonel's contorted eye and face seemed turned full upon him as he returned, but Lew-chee appeared utterly oblivious of anything but his work. In the midst of men such as these, he must dissemble to the utmost.

Fortunately for Lew-chee, he did not know the full story. Even Wong's officers did not know. It had begun half-a-dozen years before. At that time a certain Colonel Hung was high in General Chang's favour. Hung, himself not too scrupulous a character, was quite willing to hobnob with robber-bands in time of need, and was rather elated when Wong came along after some sinister negotiations, and brought with him a body of bandits for recruits. Wong was immediately given the rank of captain and authority to do more

recruiting. He had soon a considerable band and early won a reputation for daring, or rather his men did by their reckless dare-devil exploits. To Wong went the honour. He was advanced step by step as his forces and fame grew, and with these grew also his crafty ambition. He would soon become Colonel and then who knew what?—a generalissimo, the military governor of his province, even a president of the new Republic!

By allowing his bands full license to plunder whenever an objective was attained, he soon had the most powerful fighting part of the regiment at his command, and the Colonel in his power. But it was not so easy a matter to impress or control General Chang. The General was a man of strong, stern character where military matters were concerned, not readily approached nor quick to give approval. So Wong conceived the idea of winning him by way of a family pact. If he could create such an alliance he would stand to gain in many ways. He could not but believe that the General, by virtue of his position and opportunities in such a land of turmoil, had amassed much wealth. Such a family connection would immediately give him great prestige, and with the old general's good will, he could soon, he believed, gain rapid advance. At first he thought only of some rather distant relative of the General's family, but when his spies reported that the General had an only daughter and that she was a girl with modern education, young and beautiful, his ambition went forward by leaps and bounds. Then one day while at the capital, he had seen her in parade as, with her school-mates, she passed into church. Wong's black, beady eyes roved gloatingly over the girl. He would have

her. She, in herself, would be worth any venture. Added to that were position, power, wealth, wine—what not! Who would not dare all?

He set to work to cultivate those in General Chang's confidence. Some he flattered, others he feasted, still others he bribed by rich presents from his loot. But his chief asset was Colonel Hung, whom he soon had completely under his power. Each time Wong's men won a fight the honour went to the credit of the regiment and naturally to its colonel. But Wong was the real head, and not Hung. So the latter found himself helpless without his crafty staff-officer. Soon Wong made known his ambition—an alliance with the general by marrying his daughter. Hung was not a little surprised, but could only offer his best assistance. The other officers were likewise appropriately informed. The old general found himself approached from all sides by his confidants, each and all pleading the cause and singing the praises of Major Wong.

Wong, on his part, played his best cards. He had been married before, he informed his advocates, but was now a widower. He belonged to a highly eminent family in a distant province, a family with long traditions of wealth, scholarship and official distinction, and even produced letters, all properly forged, to prove his assertions. In the presence of the general he was careful to be most respectful, attentive, obedient. He put on his best military dignity and uniform, being especially careful always to wear his coloured glasses so that his superior might not be offended by the repelling leer in his left eye.

General Chang had not been quick to conclude such an alliance. He had a deep affection for his little daughter Mae Jen. This was all the stronger as the

years had brought no son to the family, a longing very deep in each Chinese home. At times, he had even thought of adopting a son, but finally concluded that a suitable mate for his daughter would satisfy his soul. Such a son-in-law would, however, of necessity, have to become his son by adoption, for not otherwise could a father hope for the worship and homage due him, when at last he entered the land of shades. When this latter difficulty was communicated to Major Wong, he displayed an appropriate reluctance for a few days and then humbly and heartily agreed. Why should such a small matter stand in the way of his ambitions? He would, he agreed, become an adopted son as well as son-in-law on the day of the marriage.

Naturally there was much discussion in the General's home. His wife was not readily won with the account of Major Wong's military renown. The letters showing his good family, and his promise to assume the rôle of adopted son weighed more with her, and she eventually agreed to the engagement. The eight characters of the girl, showing her year, month, day and hour of birth were given over to Colonel Hung, that they might be examined in connection with those of the Major. The latter readily made his eight characters agree most harmoniously. The greatest possible peace, prosperity and posterity would attend such an alliance. The eight characters and appropriate presents were then duly exchanged. All was settled, the engagement was complete. Wong was triumphant. As for the little maid, then in her early teens, it was hers, as with all of China's many daughters, to say nothing but bow to the behest of her parents. Naturally, she was much flattered by the presents and congratulations of friends. They told her of the bravery,

ability and high connections of her future husband, and although she would not see him until the day of her marriage she thought of him much, dreamed of him often in her girlish way, as a great national hero, and looked forward gladly to the day when he should come to be both son and husband in her father's home. It would be a great thing to see her parents happy, and an especial joy that she need not, as other brides must, leave her parental roof forever. So she went on happily with her studies, her home-life and her dreams.

Then, as usually happens in China after an event is consummated, stories began to leak out of things unheard of before. The most disconcerting reports of Wong's connections with robbers began to circulate, of his cruelties in the cities and villages taken in the constant civil wars, of his bad habits, which included the inordinate use of opium and more reprehensible things. Some even averred that he had several wives, most of whom were not dead, but very much alive. Naturally the General brought these reports before his confidants and prospective son-in-law. They all assured him that they were falsehoods. Wong was apparently deeply affected. "Who can be the enemies who are spreading such vile reports?" he asked with a deeply-injured air. "If you will only aid me in tracing these falsifiers to their lair I will amply defend my character."

Through his spies and secret agents in the great long-gowned Brotherhood, he did succeed in tracing some of the stories to their source, and then his character for cruelty, oppression and murder were fully vindicated. General Chang was thus largely appeased. How could he be otherwise? But the mother and the daughter remained deeply distressed.

Then came a day when Mae Jen, returning home from her school, told her mother that she wished to be a Christian. The mother was deeply displeased. It had been a fear on the part of the parents when they allowed their daughter to attend the institution carried on by some missionary ladies, that their daughter might be induced to join their faith. For this reason they had long hesitated. But it was well known that this school was the best in the city and they coveted that for their daughter. Day by day they had warned her against listening to anything save her studies; had purposely brought in friends who strove to press upon the girl the foolishness of Christianity, and had quite often questioned her as to what the teachers said regarding their religion and her attitude toward their teachings. At first they were not a little surprised at the apparent sanity of the Christian faith, but warned their daughter to be on her guard for subtle deceptions for which these preliminaries were thought to be only decoys. As none of the latter appeared, they gradually relaxed their vigilance and even concluded that Christianity might, in some respects, be reasonable. Still they would not link themselves with such a sect. To say the least, it would be socially degrading. Who, of high family, belonged to the Christians?

And now the crash had come. The mother was deeply disconcerted. They would be the laughing-stock of all their friends. She questioned her daughter diligently as to her reasons for desiring to become a Christian. She expected to discover something silly, possibly degrading, or at any rate decidedly unsuitable for the daughter of a general. She was not a little disappointed when she failed to detect any such flaws. She found her daughter had been led to lay high stress

upon truth and faith and love and purity. She found her further maintaining that the great aim of Christianity was fulness of life, mentally, morally, physically, socially. The girl quoted such splendid sentiments as the following: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think of these things." She told her mother of words, which she said were Jesus' own: "I am come that men may have life and have it more abundantly."

Madame Chang was of good family herself. Her father had been a well-known Confucian scholar and official. She had high ideals at least as to deportment and human relations. She could find no fault with such teachings. Yet she refused her consent.

"You must not become a Christian," she said to Mae Jen. "Our family would be forever disgraced were you to take such a step. You must give up all thought of it or leave the school at once." Such an ultimatum settled the matter. Mae Jen did not wish to leave the studies she so much loved nor the school with its cleanliness, orderliness and spirit of good fellowship. She would not be a Christian—at least not openly.

But one day her mother found a New Testament in Mae Jen's room. Naturally she began to read at the beginning. She found it began with a long list of names. That affected her favourably. Jesus was, at least, of good family. He belonged to the stock of kings. The miraculous stories of stars and shepherds did not greatly trouble her. She was accustomed to even stranger things when reading of China's heroes.

When she came to the Sermon on the Mount, she was deeply moved. Here were high standards indeed. Jesus was assuredly a sage. Also, He seemed to put His truths with a simplicity and clearness that brought conviction. When on her return from school a few days later Mae Jen found her mother deep in the new book's pages, she expected another long and serious talk. There was one, but it was one of inquiry, not of inquisition.

Heretofore the mother had kept rigidly aloof from the foreign teachers. She now determined to make their personal acquaintance. On a trivial excuse she accompanied her daughter to school. She was surprised and greatly impressed by what she saw. The stately school building, its height, cleanliness, order and comfort all appealed to her. So did the students. What a sight to see several scores of girls sitting studiously at their books, playing at pianos or romping about a gymnasium full of the frolic of youth! What a change from the cramped feet and cribbed social customs of her youth! Had she been older she might have resented it, but now in mid-life she wished rather that she might return and share the soul of it all. The Western ladies took her to their own home and showed her through their rooms. Her heart went out to the cleanliness and comfort to be seen everywhere. The fruits of Christianity in school and home were assuredly of the best.

Another day she went to the hospital conducted by the same society for the women and children of China. She was even more astonished than she had been at the school. The spotless wards, the white uniforms of the nurses, the neat beds with their red-cross spreads, above all the spirit of service and sacrifice

for the poor and wretched of her race mightily impressed her. She went home perplexed yet full of a deeper purpose to know more. She prepared a big feast to which she invited her friends and also a number of the foreign ladies as her guests. At the feast she gave an opportunity for the latter to tell their story. They gladly welcomed the opportunity.

"We have come to China," they said, "to open up schools, hospitals and churches. We have done this because the first helps the people mentally, the second physically, the third morally and spiritually. Thus they hope to aid China in making all-round women. That was the message of our Master, that people might be perfect, even as the Father in Heaven was perfect."

Later they answered many questions and, on parting, invited their hostess and fellow-guests to call upon them at their homes and to attend the services in the church.

The former part of the invitation was readily accepted, and many new guests appeared through the influence of Madame Chang's introduction. But church-attendance was quite a different thing. Few cared or dared to go to a place which was so open to the public. Even Madame Chang, though she greatly wished to hear all, was slow of acceptance. When she did it was in disguise, dressed in her plainest garb. But the sermon she heard gave her a new vision. "Thy kingdom come" was the text of the speaker, a young Chinese graduate of the college, well known at the capital. From these words he painted a new society for China, founded on truth and trust and love, a society which could only come as men and women individually were transformed by the spirit of Christ.

Again she returned to her home to read and re-read the pages of the New Testament. She felt that a new power was entering her life and that of her daughter, and she was hungry to have more.

During these days letters were continually coming from her husband. Major Wong was pressing for the fulfilment of the wedding agreement. This, possibly more than she was aware, was having its influence upon her. On the one hand was a promise of a new life of freedom for her daughter, on the other thralldom to a man of whom, as the stories multiplied, she felt an utter abhorrence. Under the old customs there was no hope. An exchange of the eight characters once given formed an irrevocable bond. Wretched woman that she was, she had sold her daughter to this villain and who could save? She tried to keep her fears from Mae Jen, but the latter soon divined her mother's secret and they often sat silently weeping together.

After some time they told their secret to their new-found friends among the foreign ladies. The latter were also deeply distressed. They made inquiries through various channels regarding Wong, and all reports served to increase their disgust. But they, too, had to confess themselves powerless. They had no right to break so solemn an undertaking as had been given. One day the mother came and reported to the foreign ladies that Wong was bringing almost unbearable pressure upon her husband and the family.

"There is but one way out," she said. "It is the old Chinese way. Mae Jen must commit suicide. That will be honourable, and will end all. It will even turn public opinion against Wong and all will be well."

The foreign ladies were dumbfounded. "Such a thing is impossible, unthinkable," they told Madame

Chang. "Won't you allow your daughter to come and live in our school with us and thus avoid danger of any force which Wong might use? There is nothing wrong in postponing such an engagement, and she will be safe here."

The suggestion was accepted. Mae Jen became a part of the big school-family and a still greater intimacy sprung up between her and her teachers. Madame Chang was accordingly a frequent visitor. She and her daughter became more deeply versed in the teachings and spirit of the new faith and, finally, one joyous Sabbath in May, they came boldly forth and joined the Christian cause.

General Chang offered very little opposition. As he had moved about the country, he had been on friendly terms with many missionaries, had given and received many favours from them, and was willing to leave the matter to his womenfolk to decide for themselves. Indeed, he rather welcomed it as a way of assuring himself against any treachery to his daughter on the part of Wong, whom he was beginning less and less to trust.

This balking of his ambitions and desires had naturally roused deep resentment in the heart of Wong. He had his secret agents out through the Long-Gowned Brotherhood watching for any opportunity to force the issue. In this way he had learned of the summer visit of Madame Chang and her daughter to the village west of the capital. Quickly and secretly word had been sent to The Feathered Hen and his gang. They had surrounded the village suddenly, had captured Madame Chang and her daughter, and Wong seemed triumphant. Unfortunately for him, some of the sub-chiefs of the gang had not understood the inner meaning of the movement, so plans had slightly miscarried.

Moreover they had not counted on the courage of a captive youth and the assistance of a poor priest who, as we have seen, succeeded in restoring the two helpless women to safety.

So chagrined had been The Feathered Hen and his gang over the event, and so sure were they of Wong's fury, that they had kept the escape secret for some time. When later Wong learned the truth, his fury against General Chang was unbounded. At first he refused to see him again, but under pressure of his officers, he went to make his demands once more. This time he was servile, but presuming upon his reputed fame for the recent victory and burning with rage, made his demand with ill-concealed hauteur. But the old general suddenly snubbed him, dismissed him from his presence, and Wong could do nothing but bow his hate and humiliation. Returning to his company, he fired his whole escort with his fury, and that very day left the headquarters camp for his own city.

XVII

BANDIT BANDS

STRANGE was the chain of circumstances which had brought Lew-chee, the youth who loved and mourned one he deemed dead, and Wong, the bandit who was claiming the same maiden for self-satisfaction and aggrandisement, together. It was well that no subtle telepathy revealed each to the other. Wong knew the youth only as one among his crowd of followers whom he had discovered could write characters. Lew-chee, however, now knew more of his chief. He had had opportunities enough to discover his villainy, and now this further revelation had come. Wong apparently all but held, as he believed, the sister of his beloved dead within his grasp. It set Lew-chee stirring with a great resolve. Yet there sat the two men within the upper courtyard of the old Yamen, the youth simulating utter indifference, yet listening with utmost attention to all that occurred as he went forward with his writing, and his chief white and wild with rage.

"Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad," runs the old adage from the West. It applies equally well to the East. Wong seemed to throw all discretion to the winds and snapped out his decisions boldly.

"I have been patient long enough with old 'coolie' Chang," he snarled. "I will now show him another side. Who are the real strength of the army? Are they not the officers and men of my regiment?"

To this the inner courtyard rang with resounding shouts of assent.

"We are to march upon the big commercial city, Chungking, within another week," Wong continued. "There will be a good opportunity then. Let the old softie look out for his worthless head. I and my regiment are through being his skulking dogs."

These and similar deliverances continued for an hour seemed to somewhat relieve the rage of Wong. Gathering his gang about him, they began to discuss more detailed plans. A few bottles of Western wine gulped down greedily went far to add loquacity to the discussion. After much drinking and talking it was decided that old "coolie" Chang should no longer be head of the army. Colonel Wong was undoubtedly the choice of their group and indeed of the whole soldier body. It was necessary, therefore, that old Chang be defeated, indeed, lest there might be a few who would cling to him, he must be utterly destroyed. Yet it would not do to assassinate him. That might be easily done, as he often went about boldly without a guard. No; such a course would not do. There might be quite a body of the soldiers ready to support the General, after all. Then Colonel Wong proposed a plan to which all readily agreed.

"We will open negotiations with the enemy," he said. "In that way we can secure more money and ammunition. We will arrange that when old Chang's army reaches the city, the enemy shall come out and make an attack with all his force. As for our regiment, we will remain behind under some pretext or another. Then, while the attack is being delivered upon Chang from the front, our men will suddenly attack him from the rear. Old Chang will thus be

squeezed between the two forces and both he and his guard utterly annihilated. If the old coolie is killed in the fray, well and good; if not, we will capture him and make him crawl to our will."

Boisterous and prolonged assent followed Wong's deliverance. More wine and wisdom flowed. It was agreed that even with all their treachery, the task might not be easy of accomplishment. Old Chang had trained his men well, had treated them fairly, and many would probably fight loyally and long for him. It would be necessary, therefore, to call in all the robber-bands of the Brotherhood from far and wide. These would bring arms and others would be insisted upon from the enemy. No time must be lost. Let the bands be summoned immediately. Let orders be issued at once.

Lew-chee, ostensibly busy over other things, soon found himself taking down lists of robber-leaders to whom immediate summons was to be sent. He had already seen many of these ruffians coming and going in the Yamen and wrote down their names readily. It was with difficulty, however, that he concealed his concern when the name of The Feathered Hen was mentioned. Old memories thronging in left him motionless for a moment, but the need of caution also came and he wrote on undetected. The list was finished. Beggars, women, and other agents of the great secret organization were soon scurrying far and wide. Even the telegraph and telephones of the West could scarcely have disseminated the summons more speedily and effectively. That night the lodge, for miles around, heard the summons and hastened to obey.

Early next day straggling bands began to arrive. The men were sent to be quartered in temples, inns,

private homes, anywhere. Who cared for the common people? They were a pack of cowards anyway. Cut them down if they even protest! About midday there was a flurry. The Feathered Hen was arriving. Even among banditti bands, he created a sensation. He had a fame all his own, earned through long years of successful evasion of law, and brutal cruelty to captured towns and villages. Anxious to appease Wong, his military leader, for the escape of Madame Chang and her daughter, he had brought along a goodly number of recruits, many of them henchmen of long standing. Lew-chee watched him with contending emotions as he came riding into the courtyard. He was seated high upon a big, black mule, well covered with red streamers, the decorations of frightened villagers as he had rode through their streets. He descended from his mule with some little difficulty, and was apparently rather lame in one limb. But he stood erect with rough bravado when it was announced that Wong was approaching, and made a crude salute as that officer came near. Being now in need of the bandit chief's aid, Wong seemingly forgot his rage against him for the escape of his prisoners and welcomed him with special signs of distinction.

Lew-chee's observations were suddenly cut short. A man in The Feathered Hen's retinue was moving in his direction. Lew looked at him intently. There could be no mistake. There he was, with his big, leering eyes fixed full upon him, the man with the harelip and protruding tooth—Pastor Ma's "deacon." Lew-chee stood motionless for a moment. But the ruffian was pushing his way towards him, gesticulating as he came. There was not time to be lost. So stooping down to hide his unusual height and without waiting

even to seek his few belongings in his room, Lew-chee wriggled his way rapidly toward the gate. To be identified by the "deacon" with all the power of a henchman of The Feathered Hen in such a crowd, was a sure introduction to torture and death. The guards recognizing Lew's uniform allowed him to pass and he went quickly into the street. Stepping briskly forward, he began to wonder as what must be his next move. Then a guard called from behind, and turning about he saw the "deacon" and others coming at full speed toward him. There was nothing for it but to run, and Lew-chee's long legs carried him forward with commendable speed.

The gang behind also ran well, but seeing themselves outdistanced began calling on the crowd along the street to stop and hold the runaway. No one, however, appeared ready to touch a soldier, especially one of such size as the runner, so he passed through the crowds without obstruction. Doubling to and fro among the streets, he succeeded in out-distancing his pursuers, and at length came to a pause in a narrow alley. He was safe for the moment, but what was the next move? He knew the intricacies of the Brotherhood too well to believe that all was over and that the deacon and his gang would go quietly back to their chief. Even before his detection in the courtyard his whereabouts had doubtless been known. The deacon had been but biding his time. The net would now be closely drawn. The forces all over the city would be warned and on the *qui vive* for his capture. What was to be done?

He thought of any possible friends he might have in the city. There were none. Yes, there was Pastor Ma. He had seemed just. But possibly he, too, was

in league with these men. Were they not his members? And even if the pastor should consent to aid him, his hiding-place would soon be discovered and he would be in Colonel Wong's power. Moreover there was the street to face again, many streets. No, that was impossible. There was danger in facing any street again. Why not scale the wall into some compound? The people might, if they knew the facts, aid him against these ruffians. No, that was dangerous, too. How could he scale a wall without the people believing he had come for purposes of robbery? He wandered deeper down the alley. A small, unpainted gate in a side-wall faced him. He tried it. It was firmly closed. It was doubtless the door for servants and scavengers to some wealthy house. He rapped, even pounded the boards. There was no reply. Then he put his full weight against it and pushed, but it did not give way.

Just then a shout came from the head of the alley. He listened. Someone was coming. He could hear the sound of voices and feet just around the corner. A great fear seized him. He gave the door another push and it gave way so suddenly that he fell in upon his back. But he was upon his feet again in an instant and leaning hard against the door. The men were passing.

"Try that door," said a voice.

"It is barred tight," said another.

"Tight," reiterated a third, and the feet and voices passed on.

Lew-chee drew a long breath. It had been a close call. He barred the door as best he could and began to look about him. He was in the corner of a large compound. There were no signs of life. He advanced

quietly among some groups of trees toward the buildings. Still no one was visible. He went along the side toward the front. There would surely be someone there. He reached the front courtyard. Still all was deserted, but something about the place looked vaguely familiar. He went to the front gate. There would surely be a gatekeeper there. The gate was securely bolted. As he turned about, the place seemed even more to revive old memories. Like a flash the associations returned. He saw again the group of dastardly men dragging forward a few frightened women. The scene rose so vividly that he almost believed it real, felt again the weird impulse to rush forward to the rescue. He leaned against a big gateway pillar to collect his thoughts. What strange freaks fate was playing with him. Had some evil spirit led him here to taunt him with that night's rashness; to have him slaughtered when he had sought to save? Or might there be a friend among this family who could aid him now in his hour of need?

Arousing himself he wandered slowly and cautiously about the courtyard, peeping into doorways and through the torn paper of the windows. There was no sign of life. Within the rooms all was disorder. From there he entered through the second doors into the upper court. Here again all was deserted, and again the rooms showed broken benches, beds, bowls, crocks. The place had been raided and the rabble had carried off everything remotely usable. For an hour he continued his search. His only discovery was that of a large black coffin in an upper room from which a number of rats ran squealing at his approach. A foul odour filled the place. He reclosed the door hurriedly.

His hopes of finding a friend must be abandoned. But at least the place was friendly. It had and could continue to shelter him for a time. It would be well to remain where he was until the excitement of the search was over. Yes, he would spend the night there. That would give him time to think out a plan and for the vigilance to abate somewhat. He would have no food, but that was a small matter. He would have no bedding, but the nights were warm, and anywhere was a soft couch compared with the pebbles on the river bed during his long illness. It would be wise, however, to secure against surprises in the night. Looking about, he discovered a sort of loft in a side-room just beside the great guest hall. There had probably been a ladder there formerly for the women to ascend, but now even that was gone. He waited quietly until night, then by means of the large dais and a broken chair pulled himself up. He was on his guard, however, even taking the precaution to kick back the chair from the dais, lest his presence leave a trace.

He found some scattered straw upon the loft floor, gathered it together, and being wearied with the day's endeavours and excitement, fell fast asleep. Some time in the night he awakened with a start. There was a light shining somewhere, and he heard voices. Where was he? He lay very still and listened. Slowly it all came back to him. He was in the loft of this great compound, a fugitive. The voices were those of men and they were in the guest-room below him. From their position he could tell that they were on the wide dais. A familiar whiff came to his nostrils. They were evidently smoking opium. The voices were too low for him to catch their words, but he could detect that there were only two. That was good.

Should he be discovered, he felt sure he could be a match for that number. And, besides, he had his revolver.

There was no need for any alarm at present, however. Time went on, possibly an hour. Then he heard other voices. There must be ten or a dozen now. One voice stood out more strongly than the others. Was he dreaming? Assuredly he must be. No; there was no mistake. There it was again. It was the peculiar tone of the hair-lipped deacon. The deacon and his gang had him this time. He was trapped. And yet he was still safe in his loft and would await events.

The voices grew louder now and Lew-chee could now hear distinctly. The men had evidently come from a great feast at the Yamen at which The Feathered Hen and his gang, together with others, had been highly honoured. Now the deacon and his set were to do the honours. They would turn over this big compound and all its accommodations to the great robber and his henchmen. The deacon was evidently anxious to tell of his sagacity to someone who had come to inspect the premises for the chief. He told of the fine way in which he had deceived the Christian missionary and the people of his church, and of how he had used the bench under the pulpit for the storage of arms, loot and opium. The church had become the headquarters for the local Brotherhood at the small cost of repeating Pastor Ma's prayers and attending his services. As the deacon told his story the gang laughed long and boisterously.

As the talk went on Lew-chee learned that the place in which they were was the richest home of the gentry in the city. The robbers had looked after the loot

first, and had sent it away without protest from the people within. They knew Wong would appreciate a visit from the gentry-women. They had driven all the men out first, with the exception of an old fellow who, with some older women, had made a protest. But they had soon silenced the old chap. He was safe now in a special box in another court. Again the crowd laughed. They were proceeding well when a lank soldier fool had suddenly appeared and broken in. He had slashed about him like a fiend and they had to give way. But they had returned later and although the women had disappeared, they had secured more plunder, and locking up the place had held it for themselves. It was now to be turned over to the great chief, The Feathered Hen. They only asked that he use his forces and influence to catch this soldier. They had met him at their church, and had long waited for him this very day at the Yamen. They could have no peace until they could "sleep on his hide." A clamour of curses followed. The big chief's representative promised his assistance amid much applause, thanked them for their quarters and sat down on the dais to gulp down a pot of wine.

The talk then became desultory, but Lew-chee learned that the walls and gate were all carefully guarded. Agents of the society were everywhere searching for his arrest. He was to be shot or stabbed at sight. Who would investigate one soldier's death at such a time as this? Moreover, they had inquired at the Yamen and no one knew who he was, and no one would make any fuss over his death. With the great chief's aid, they would have him now. At this point the delegate deemed that he must depart, and

the deacon and his gang went forth to conduct their guest to the great gate.

As the light and voices disappeared, Lew-chee realized that he must make a bolt for it before the gang returned. They would no doubt await the arrival of The Feathered Hen and his followers, and then all escape would be impossible. Creeping to the edge of the loft, he listened intently. He heard the sound of footsteps pacing to and fro below. There seemed to be two men, possibly those who had arrived early for their opium smoke, he thought. Should he slip down quietly and break through them? He determined to do so, but first he would try a ruse. Feeling about him, he discovered some of the loose straw and crumpling it into a ball, threw it down in the direction of the voices, at the same time uttering a weird call he had learned long ago in the hills. It worked more effectively than he had hoped. With a curse on the "devils" the men fled rapidly in pursuit of the rest of the party. Lew-chee dropped quickly down from his hiding-place and made his way to the small door by which he had entered the compound.

Passing through it, he hurried along the alley and out into the deserted street. He did not know where he was going, but hoped that he might discover some sort of hiding-place. If he failed in this he would rush for the city wall and jump over it. To be sure, that course had its grave dangers of arrest, too, and the chance of a broken leg besides, but it was a case of death against death. For an hour he skulked about, slipping into side-alleys whenever he heard footsteps or voices. Fortunately the streets were dark and the chances of detection small. As he wandered along, groping his way along the dark recesses of a

narrow street he suddenly stumbled over something. Feeling down he discovered it to be a man fast asleep. Intuitively he knew the fellow must be a beggar.

A suggestion came to him suddenly. He had played the beggar before by the brookside, and that successfully. Why not try it now? He wakened the man and asked him if he wished to earn something? The man was more than eager for such good fortune. Then Lew-chee made him a startling offer. He was to exchange clothing with him, ask no questions, and if he did not return in two days to this same spot, the outfit was to be his. The beggar was readily persuaded.

"You will not be detected in such a mass of non-descript newcomers as are now come to the city," said Lew. "You will have money for food, and the uniform and arms, which you can pawn later, represent a fortune."

The exchange was made as quickly as possible in the darkness. Lew-chee sent the beggar upon his way, fitted out in uniform and then he donned his new possessions.

These were few and loathsome. He could not see the full details in the darkness, but knew he had a wretchedly ragged gown, a large piece of old palm-bark matting, a stick and a broken bowl. His skin was still dark from his long exposure to the sun and rain in the river-bed. That would prove a real asset now. So would his beggar's training. A liberal application of dirt and ashes over head and body, and the selection of a half-secluded spot on a public street, enabled him to pass through the next day successfully. That evening as dusk was falling, and just before the great gates of the city swung to for the night, what appeared to be a blind man led by a small beggar boy

pushed his way through the dense crowd. Making their way through several side-streets in the suburbs, the man and boy shuffled along until they came to some wretched straw shacks dimly outlined in the darkness. Then the blind man suddenly threw off his age and decrepitude. He reached among his rags for a dollar, which he handed to the astonished child, and then strode away swiftly into the country. The man was Lew-chee, weary with his long deception, but now free.

XVIII

TREACHERY

LEW-CHEE wanted to shout aloud in his newly-found freedom, but that he knew would be indiscreet. Instead, he found the road leading toward General Chang's camp and walked with a will far into the night. He paused but once, that was beside a small stream dimly distinct in the starlight. He plunged into the water rags and all, rolling over and over, a grim vengeance adding vigour to his ablutions. For half an hour he scrubbed and scoured, then slowly adjusting his tattered raiment started again on his journey. At some hour in the early morning he had made such progress that he could make sure of reaching his goal next day, so going aside to a big tree on a hill-top he lay down and was soon fast asleep.

When he awoke some crows were cawing excitedly in the tree-top, evidently holding a committee of investigation over him. There were times, long ago, when such cries had seemed almost like sweet music. That was when, each evening, flocks of crows returned to their nests among the trees about the temple. In those days Lew-chee welcomed their returning calls. They spoke of home-coming, of mating, of rest and peace. This morning as he awoke to their clamour his emotions were widely different. His memories went back to the sad days by the stream-side. Crows in the grove might be docile doves, but out in the wider world they were murderous, cruel, carrion things.

Answering to an impulse, he sprang to his feet and hurled stone after stone at the intruders, continuing his outburst until they were far away. Then, exhausted, he stretched himself out by the roots again. Cursed things, crows! They, too, were out to prey upon the world, and even men, when they dared. Destroyers all. Yes, agents of the devils who dominated the world.

Something struck his head as he leaned back. It was a stone slab. He understood it at once. It was the side of a small hut, three feet high, in which sat the images of the old man of the spot and his spouse. They were the local guards of the fields and home round about. The farmers had established them and their dwelling to protect them against devils and other evil forces that infested the neighbourhood.

There it was again, thought Lew-chee, everywhere poor man putting up his puny hand against devils. The Taoists were out to destroy them, but they were a fraud. The Christians, according to Pastor Ma, had a remedy, but he had tried that, too, and it had failed. Whoever it was who had made the world had made a sorry mess of it. Why had they given all things over to the devils? It must be that the gods were like the majority of officials on earth. They had been bribed by the devils, and in some way secured a share of the spoils. They probably even enjoyed watching the world in its torture. Lew-chee was fast becoming a pessimist. What worse sort of world could there be than this? Desires, despite the Buddhists, would not let men die. The devils, despite the Taoist and Christian efforts, would not let men live. Surely the old proverb was true—man was ever between the cliff and the precipice! Sleep seemed the only solace,

and so lying down again Lew was soon deep in its embrace.

When next he awoke, the autumn sun was high in the heavens. A slight breeze was blowing across the hill-tops. Leaves and twigs in the great tree overhead played lazily, as though languidly amused at the sunshine and shadow alternately chasing each other across his face. He blinked half-blindly as the full rays of the sun shot into his pupils, then raised himself slowly on his elbow. What a picture met his gaze! All about were low hills similar to the one on which he was resting, crowned with trees, tiny temples, or rows of tasselled corn. Down the sides, like giant stairs went terrace upon terrace, thick fields of waving rice, while in the valleys sparkling streams wound their ways wantonly, unimpeded by the great bamboo water-wheels which earlier had flooded the flats above and about. Far and near came the sound of the harvesters. They were busy, sickle in hand, cutting the yellow grain and threshing out its precious berries. On the slope below him he could see a small party of farmers at work. Stripped to the waist, they were cutting large handfuls of the standing stocks, carrying these a few steps to a great box which stood near by, lashing the heads over the planks until all the grain had fallen within, then throwing the straw in a sheaf, to quickly return for another supply. Some one was singing an old-time harvest song. Who knew or cared how many centuries it had passed from lip to lip? It was comforting, cheering to them. The others joined in the refrain and jostled one another joyously as they passed and repassed toward the threshing box.

Lew-chee had evidently strayed farther than he had thought from the beaten track of the soldier and rob-

ber-bands. What a scene of peace and prosperity! What a contrast to the cursed city and the human fiends from which he had just fled. Surely there must be powers that make for comfort and conviviality in this world as well as those that damn and destroy. He looked again long and meditatively at the smiling landscape and listened to the songs of the harvesters. Yes, there must be agencies that made for life as truly as those that made for death. He turned his eyes within. How quickly he had changed. A few hours ago, when first awakening, he was ready to curse everything and seek sleep as the only solace. Now he felt new desires within him, desires to live on, to think, to act, to be. Would that he could aid the world everywhere to such scenes as he beheld before him. Would that he might crush out the curse of carrion hordes in yonder city. Would that he might ally himself in some way with the powers that made for peace, prosperity and perfection. But were they to be found?

Thus reflecting he had risen to his feet and now stood leaning against the great tree. He looked up again into the swaying branches. He thought of the big banyan that had sheltered him after his struggle with death in the river-bed. He recalled his new-found theory then that all was desire and that it should be lord. He shuddered at the thought. No. Wong and his harpies in yonder camp were the products of that. To give rein to desire and passion was to curse the earth. But were all desires debasing, devilish? He thought again of the dollar he had left for the old stall woman under the tree. He recalled his sparing of the militia man's life when he might have killed him. He thought of the mad frenzy that seized him

at the sight of the "deacon" and his gang dragging off helpless women. Surely there were desires and desires! Some indeed might debase, but others ennobled, this manhood of ours.

He stretched forth his arms to the great tree above. This, too, was a banyan. It was under such a tree that the Buddha had attained his enlightenment. He had concluded that all life was sorrow and suffering, that at the root of these was desire. Therefore desire must be destroyed. It was but deception leading to destruction. Then he thought of his violent reaction against this under the big tree by the brook. He had then concluded that all desire was right, and had gone forth to give full rein to his passions. Now he was convinced that both attitudes were extreme. All desires were not devilish, neither were all divine.

Man was a bundle of desires. Some of these led to sorrow and suffering, others led upward to progress and peace. He felt that he, too, had attained a new enlightenment and a great new enthusiasm filled and thrilled him. The Feathered Hen, The Tiger, the "deacon," Colonel Wong and all their ilk were swayed by desires that spelt death and desolation. His father and mother, and the simple mountaineers, these humble harvesters toiling on for food and clothing and shelter; Mae Jen and her mother with their learning, poise, purity, these too were dominated by desire, but they were the desires that made for health and happiness, peace and plenty.

A new thought flashed within him. Was this the secret of "The Laughing Buddha," the Buddha-that-is-to-be? The old Buddha sat forever pensive, seeking to suppress all thought, emotion, sensation, desire. The Buddha-that-is-to-be sat wreathed in smiles,

laughter radiating from all his healthy form, kindness speaking from his attitudes, little children rollicking, rolling over his shoulders. Surely he had the secret. The future Buddha did not seek to destroy desire. He made the higher desires supreme and they suppressed the lower. Assuredly that was the secret of "The Laughing Buddha." That was the real enlightenment. A new enthusiasm thrilled Lew-chee with a great purpose.

Something uncomfortable in his clothing recalled him to earth. He looked down at his rags and tatters and smiled grimly. He was indeed a sorry figure to go forth as herald of a new enlightenment. What if he should start down the hill and begin to declaim before these horny-handed harvesters? What would they know or care were he to declare to them that man was a bundle of desires, and that within him a constant warfare was being waged between the baser and the best? They would probably hoot him away as a beggar or hold him in half-awe as a sorcerer, and request him to write them some charm against sickness or soldiers. No, the situation demanded not so much the proclamation of his doctrine as more power to the doers. Theoretically every one was taking part in the struggle. It was for him to go forth and throw all his force on the side of the higher motives. That was not far to seek. General Chang stood for protection against robbers, for justice, honesty, peace, prosperity. Colonel Wong was going about grinding the peasantry to poverty, spreading crime and cruelty everywhere. Were he to win now in his nefarious plot against the General, not only would his loved one's mother and sister suffer, but men and women far and wide throughout the fair province must be led captive to the brute-

desires of Wong and his band. No, Wong must not win. A holy memory of dark, earnest eyes looking steadily into his on a mountain-top touched something far down in the depths of Lew-chee's soul. He sprang forth into the midday sun and struck rapidly across the fields, pausing only now and then to inquire the nearest way to the city.

There was little trouble in carrying out the first part of his plan. With the sum he had still retained in his wallet, he made his way to the nearest pawnshop. There for a small price he obtained a clean though well-patched blue gown and a few other necessities. Later in the afternoon he found the shop where the recruiting officers had hung out their flag and was soon once again a soldier. An hour later and he was in one of the camps with headquarters in a guild building, dressed out in the grey cotton uniform of his company and demonstrating to his captain that he knew many things regarding the profession of arms.

When it was evident to the officers that they had found a man considerably above the average recruit, Lew-chee was made a corporal and a few days later a sergeant. The countryside was being scoured for men. Lew-chee worked hard to drill them. Was not every recruit a new power for the fight toward right? His big body and voice, his intelligence and enthusiasm were commending him daily to both officers and men. In another week he was given rank as lieutenant and was out on the great high road for the distant commercial city, Chungking. There the enemy forces had collected to control the traffic of the great upper Yangtse and must be dislodged if trade and all it represented to the economic life of the province was to be restored. Lew-chee saw new meaning in life

now and marched forward joyfully. It was to be part of the great fight of right against wrong, of the desires that draw men upward against those that uncontrolled debase, drag men downward.

He made little attempt to tell his theory to his comrades. What would they know or care for such doctrines? He felt that his was a world apart from theirs. And yet they could be made to understand if approached in a practical way for he saw his new theory illustrated everywhere. At nights, therefore, as the men squatted around in the courtyards of the big temples or sat at the tea tables in the inns, Lew spoke to them of the need of food, clothing, homes for their fathers and mothers and neighbours; of the need of a fair deal for all; of the only way out from the present oppression, and of the present imperative that existed, for a fight to the utmost against self-seekers and spoilers of homes, villages, cities and countryside. Such appeals met with ready response. His men began to cluster about him to hear more of his conversation. They rose with greater alacrity in the morning, marched more resolutely on the journey, took a new interest in instructions as to the ways that win, treated each other with greater courtesy and the country people en route with more consideration. His superior officers treated Lew-chee with respect and his subordinates emulated his example.

Thus the days sped quickly by. A few weeks later, despite many unavoidable delays, Lew-chee and his company, together with many others, had come to that narrow neck between the great Yangtse and one of its tributaries which marks the approach to Chungking from the west. This spot, called locally the Buddha's Head Barrier; was naturally the first defence of the

enemy and was held in strength. Here General Chang halted his men awaiting the arrival of more troops and the maturing of his plans.

During these weeks, Lew-chee had seen little of his commander, though he was ever in his thoughts.

"Wong must not win," ran ever through the warp and woof of his activities. He alone of all those thousands knew the treachery meditated by the Colonel and his regiment.

"How shall I reveal the fact to my general?" he asked himself. "I might go immediately to headquarters and make the facts known to the secret service men. But that would be to advertise the fact everywhere, and would spell disaster. Wong will then adopt other tactics and probably try to cut our communications or attack the capital itself while the General and his troops are engaged far away. No, the wiser way will be to keep my own counsel until Wong and his men are actually present, and then report suddenly to General Chang."

Lew's plans carried well. Colonel Wong and his regiment arrived, professing the utmost loyalty and longing to join in the common cause. Lew-chee watched from a distance one day as Wong and his aides rode gaily to headquarters and reported for instructions. Another day and the word came that the attack was to commence on the morrow at daybreak. The time for action had arrived. That night just after dusk Lew-chee presented himself before his superior officer and asked to be taken before the General. He had something most important to communicate. After considerable parley, he found himself in General Chang's presence. The tall, old man was pacing slowly up and down talking to a senior officer as the

youth approached. As he turned, Lew-chee found two deeply set eyes fixed upon him.

"Speak!" he heard a steady voice saying. Lew-chee did not speak. How could he make such an accusation against Colonel Wong while guards and officers stood about. Drawing forth a letter from his sleeve he saluted and handed it to a guard who delivered it to the tall, waiting commander. Opening the note, the General read:

"Colonel Wong is a traitor. He has sworn to have your life and that of many of your men, then to seize your wife and daughter. His regiment will attack you from the rear as soon as the battle presents an opportunity tomorrow. I will give you positive proof of this or my life is forfeit. Signed, He who stands before you."

Again the piercing eyes of the General were fixed upon the youth, while the group of officers also turned to scrutinize the young lieutenant. Lew-chee met the scrutiny steadily, awaiting the result.

"Take the officer to my room and await my arrival!" said the General to the guard, and Lew-chee followed the latter to the inner temple.

He had not long to wait. A few minutes later and the General with four of his staff arrived. The guard retired and Lew-chee told his story. His details and straightforward delineation of events left no doubt in the minds of his hearers. Still rash action must not be taken. Lew-chee was set aside under guard, for a time, and cautioned to say nothing. The heads of the secret-service were summoned and sent to make investigations. By midnight Lew-chee's story had been confirmed. He was again summoned before the General and Lew-chee thought the deep-set eyes took on

a softer look as he was thanked for his conspicuous display of duty.

"This is not the time for rewarding such service, Lieutenant Lew," said the steady voice of the General. "You will be summoned later. Is there anything further you have to say?"

"Only that I may be permitted to have a share in the fight when Wong attacks, sire," said the youth.

"Granted," was the ready reply. "You may prepare at once."

Lew-chee bowed and left the presence of his chief.

He had scarcely reached his company when orders came that the men were to march to a point indicated. Lew-chee went about his task with enthusiasm. Quite evidently they were going to meet guile with guile. Wong was not to be given his choice of opportunities, but was to be attacked at once. Lew-chee extolled his general's strategy as he went forward through the silent night with his groups of silent men. Orders were to capture, if possible, the Colonel and his staff, then to surround the regiment and disarm the men, and Lew-chee was eager to be well to the fore in such a fray.

The attack came well before dawn, but the surprise was not all on one side. Though Lew-chee led his men forward with splendid skill, some of them were not so gifted. Wong's men had learned of the night movement and suspicions were aroused. Thus Lew-chee and his men when they made a rush upon the Colonel's quarters in an old farmhouse were met by a volley of shots from a well-barricaded building. But they soon scaled the low, mud wall and fought furiously for the inner buildings. For a time all was darkness. Then someone among the enemy set fire

to a stack of rice-straw around which many of Lew-chee's men had taken cover and the whole scene was lit up as by the sun at noonday.

The young lieutenant rushed his men forward and succeeded in gaining the inner courtyard. He felt sure Wong and his staff would be found in the upper rooms, so he pressed furiously on. It was now a hand-to-hand struggle, and some of the Colonel's robber-guard were fighting tenaciously, like wolves at bay. Among them Lew-chee saw The Feathered Hen and he sprang forward to seize him. As he did so a familiar figure obstructed his way. He almost chuckled with glee as he met his man, it was the hair-lipped "deacon." But the latter had evidently recognized him, and Lew-chee received an ugly sword slash on the right shoulder. He felt the sharp sting, then the warmth of something slowly saturating his side. Yet he fought on with high spirit. It was to him one of the most joyous days of life. Death held for him no terrors. He had faced it before with Mae Jen on the rope-bridge, on the precipice verge and on the river. To live was to live for her father and his new vision of right—to die was to go to Mae Jen. He dealt the "deacon" a staggering blow with his naked fists that sent him reeling. Then with a bound he seized The Feathered Hen to drag him forward.

A shout went up from some of the chief's followers. A half-dozen rushed at the youth and began a frenzied attack with swords and bayonets. Quickly Lew-chee hurled The Feathered Hen headlong into the ranks behind him and revolver in one hand and sword in the other stood his ground defending himself deftly against the onslaught. His men strove bravely to give him aid, but his height, rank and action in attacking the

chief had drawn the attack of the enemy full upon him. Despite his efforts to avoid it, a sword caught his left arm and his revolver fell from his grasp. A moment later and a bayonet had found its way to his breast and again he felt the sting and the curious warmth of flowing blood. Right and left he flashed his sword, now defending, now striking down his adversaries. A strange exultation seemed to possess him, together with a strength that was wild, glorious, inexhaustible. A rifle rang out from somewhere. Lew-chee reeled and then plunged heavily forward. A dozen swords, spears and bayonets seemed to strike at him as he lay. But with a mighty shout his men burst forward and charged the enemy. They broke and fled. In the *melée*, Colonel Wong, the disfigured "deacon" and The Feathered Hen managed to make good their escape. But their forces and plot were effectually shattered. Many of their followers in other parts of the camp were captured, while others abandoned their arms and ammunition and fled. By day-break all was over, and later that day General Chang's troops broke through the barrier, and on the following day captured the city.

A few of the young lieutenant's men paused in the struggle to pick up their fallen leader. A bullet had hit him in the neck. From this and other wounds, he was bleeding freely. Fortunately the men found some comfortable matting and other supplies which Wong had abandoned in his flight and laid their leader thereon. Later, some first-aid workers trained by the medical missionaries arrived and succeeded in staunching his wounds. But he lay there utterly unconscious, his deep breathing and an occasional moan alone revealing that life remained within him.

XIX

THE "WHITE NUN"

THERE was double rejoicing in Lew-chee's company when the city fell. It meant not only victory, but an opportunity to convey their young officer to the hospital of the "White Nun." Such was not its official name. That could be read in letters of gold on a blackboard swinging over a doorway on Wooden Arch street in the heart of the city. The soldiers cared nothing for that. And they cared as little that the designation "nun" was rather incongruous as applied to a Protestant Mission, or that the word "white" might be mistaken for a member of some Western race. They knew well that within the walls was a tireless little Chinese nurse, all clad in white save for a red cross upon her sleeve, and that she had been sister and friend to hundreds of homeless, helpless soldier-boys wounded in the seemingly endless struggle. There were others upon the staff, foreign and Chinese physicians and nurses, but the "white nun" stood first in the hearts and memories of these men, and hither they carried their fallen leader.

How long he lay there in the ward, one cot among the many, Lew-chee did not know. It was only slowly that he came to a realization of where he was. For a few days he had hazy notions of many white beds with red-cross coverlets, of men walking or lying about, of people who came and went doing he knew

not what. One day he awoke to find a nurse bathing his hands and head, then bending over him to adjust some bandages about his shoulder and neck. He made an attempt to speak only to realize that there was some strange thing between his lips. He attempted to remove it with his hand but to feel a sharp pain run up his arm and again unconsciousness claimed him.

A few days later and things became clearer in Lew-chee's mind. He asked an orderly where he was, and learned he was in the hospital and sorely wounded. He began slowly to recapitulate the things he last remembered. He recalled the fight at the farmhouse and the furious onslaught of The Feathered Hen's men. He wondered, vaguely, whether the chief and the Colonel had escaped. But that could wait. He was still alive and the city must have been captured for he was in this ward. A soldier who came near him confirmed his conclusion. He was anxious to hear details of the fight, of the capture of the city, of General Chang, of what had become of Wong and his regiment, and of how it had fared with his own brave company. He started to question his companion, but was interrupted. A hospital orderly came forward to request that he do not talk until permission had been secured from the "white nun."

Ah, he was in the "white nun's" care then, he mused. It was she he had seen so attentively wandering among the wounded men, and it was she who had so gently tended his wounds. He recalled that clearly now. He made no protest, therefore, at the request for silence, merely asking that he might be roused when the nun came again. Then he lay back surprised at his own weakness.

An hour later he was again awake and could hear

the low murmur of voices here and there about him. Suddenly the conversations ceased.

"She's coming," someone said, and many faces turned toward the doorway. In a moment a figure in white entered. Lew-chee turned his eyes in her direction. Yes, it was the same figure he had seen before, flitting to and fro among the cots and standing by his side. Now he noted more carefully than before the dainty white cap with its narrow black band, the red cross on her arm and the small white shoes that stepped so noiselessly here and there. She gradually came nearer, stopping at each cot for a word, a smile, or the more lengthy examination and a dressing. At length she was by his side. He looked up into her face, and caught the dark luster of her eyes.

"Ah," she said, "you are better today, Lieutenant Lew."

"Yes, I am doing well, many thanks to you," he replied, smiling as best he could.

"Thank God for that, not me," was her answer. "But you must not talk yet. I trust you as a good soldier to obey my orders."

He started to make his request regarding seeing his comrades, but she only smiled and placed her finger to her own lips as a sign for silence, then passed on to another patient.

"She's been mighty good to you," whispered a companion from the next cot, as she departed. "For the first few days she scarcely left you. Rest assured she knows what's best."

Lew-chee made no reply. He simply watched the small figure as it went on its mission of mercy. Later she left the ward and he fell to meditating, as of old, on the mysteries of life.

He had heard often of the "white nun." The recruits among his men had naturally to learn many things of warfare and wounds, and the veterans delighted to instruct them. Among other things they had been urged, if wounded in the attack upon the city, to insist on being carried to the "white nun's" place. That Lew-chee had heard many times over. His first acquaintance with it was among the rough, robber-ranks of Colonel Wong. Many of these bandits were proud of their wounds. They displayed them as marks of merit. They liked to tell of operating tables, surgeons' knives and the mysterious medicine that sent a man to sleep so that he knew nothing till he woke again all bandaged and in his bed. They laughed at all that, but when they came to talk of nurses their voices calmed down in unconscious tribute, and when anyone added that he had been under the care of the "white nun," the voices further softened and said, in substance, the same brief story over and over again, "That white nun is white all through!"

Lew-chee had often wondered in days gone by if he would ever meet this popular heroine, even of the bandit-bands. Now he had not only seen her, but his life had also been in her keeping. Wherein lay the secret of her influence? What was her charm for these rough lives about her? Was it her white uniform? Doubtless that had its influence. Was it her comely countenance? Possibly, for her features were good. Was it her winsome smile? Yes, that, too, won her many friends probably. But all those things might be found elsewhere. No, there was something more. It must be service, slaving away indiscriminately for soldiers who were utter strangers to her, mere passing transients, bandits, robbers, their bad-

ness branded upon their brows. Who could be indifferent to such spirit and sacrifice as the "white nun" showed?

But why should she make such sacrifice? Aye, that was a more puzzling query. It could not be for wealth. No one thought of her as accumulating money. It could not be for fame. Who would think it fame to be praised by common soldiers and banditti? No, there must be something deeper down, more subtle in such service. Could it be that she, too, had discovered the secret of life? Might it be that she realized that this world was a struggle of desires, in which the lower must be brought to heel for the triumph of the higher? And had she dedicated her soul to arousing in these rough and ribald men those higher aspirations as shown in her work and sweet womanhood? Yes, that must surely be her secret. He smiled to think how his new-found insight could unlock the meaning of lives. It was his enlightenment. It was her enlightenment. That must be the enlightenment that would come to all when he arrived, "The Laughing Buddha," the Buddha-that-is-to-be!

Lew-chee's conviction deepened as the weeks passed. He also widened it and applied it to the whole institution, as he came to know it better. As his strength returned he became acquainted with others of the nurses and the doctors. They were mostly foreigners, and he could not study them as he could the small maiden of his own race, but they seemed to be animated by the same spirit. At first he could only read them by passing words and deeds as they came and went in the wards, but later he could wander slowly about the other rooms, watch the long lines of sufferers as they wound their way through the dis-

pensaries and even catch glimpses at times as patients were borne to and from the operating rooms. As a boy he had often gazed upon the image of the goddess of Mercy with her five hundred arms stretched out to succor.

"This hospital is that dream come true," he meditated. "But here the goddess is incarnate in every worker."

Then he thought of the long dark days of struggle under the bridge, when no goddess came and only the dogs and carrion crows sat round ready to feast upon his emaciated form.

"What was the subtle spirit that possessed this place?" he asked himself. "Not only these Western doctors, but the 'white nun' and many of her orderlies seem also to know its secret. Why had it not come to my race before? Why are my own people so indifferent to sickness, suffering and sorrow in spite of the teachings of our sages, while, here, even robbers are treated with utmost consideration?"

One day as he passed slowly along the hall he met the "white nun" busy upon her duties. He saluted and asked if he might speak.

"What is it, Lieutenant?" she asked kindly.

"I am searching for something," he replied gravely.

"For health, I presume," she rejoined smilingly.

"No," he rejoined, "you have found that for me, and are returning it rapidly. I would know rather why you thought it worthy of so much search and sacrifice?"

She looked at Lew for a moment slowly and searchingly. Then, to his surprise, he saw her tears well up and overflow. Before he could speak, she had passed

him and was gone. "Some other day!" was all she said as she went away.

A few days later as he was chatting with a companion by some tall chrysanthemums that gladdened a little garden in the compound, he felt a hand upon his sleeve. It was the "white nun" again. He and his companion quickly stood at attention.

"You are almost well, Lieutenant?" she asked simply.

"Almost," he laughed, "thanks to the 'white nun' and autumn weather."

"Then the 'white nun' has something to say to you," she continued. "If your companion will excuse us," she added, turning to the latter.

The soldier bowed and Lew-chee followed the "white nun" to a small reception room in the nurses' quarter. An old woman sat in one corner sewing. It was the trusty maid-servant and meant that, in theory, they were quite alone. The "white nun" seated her guest on the dais and sat down beside him, only the small, low tea table dividing them. The old servant brought two steaming cups of tea and then resumed her seat and sewing.

For a while they sipped in silence, then the "white nun" began.

"You asked me a question one day," she said slowly. It was a statement rather than an interrogation. Lew-chee made no reply.

"Let me first question you," she continued.

Lew-chee waited, simply bowing his assent.

"Your name is really Lew, Lieutenant?" she asked as she looked up eagerly.

"Truly," he assented.

"People at times change their names in these days of turmoil," she continued.

"But mine has always been Lew," answered the young soldier.

"You come from the city at the source of irrigation, and know the Spirit-Precipice Temple," she went on cautiously, watching him closely the while.

"Why they have named you wrongly," said Lew-chee, startled at what he heard. "They call you the 'white nun.' They should have named you the white witch. Who could have told you such things? Not even my men know me so intimately. How could you surmise such things?"

"Your turn to question comes later," she interjected. "Answer me. Are my statements true?"

"All true," he replied.

"And you knew one called The Tiger?" she whispered in a voice thrilling with emotion.

He sprang to his feet and stared at her in astonishment.

"Who are you? What are you?" he cried. "Is the teaching really true, and are you indeed some fairy in human form?"

The nurse heeded him not, but leaned forward, her whole soul seated in her eyes. "And did he ever injure you or yours?" she asked with great earnestness.

"Injure!" he cried, and his teeth snapped tightly at the thought. "The fiend! He and his gang! They shot my father, slew my mother and sold my only sister into—"

He did not finish the sentence. The girl before him uttered a cry half of joy, half of terror, and then fell prone across the dais.

Lew-chee sprang to her side.

"My sister, my sister!" he cried, as he sought to raise her. "Tell me! Tell me truly that you are my sister!"

She made no reply, but lay there limp and lifeless.

The old nurse hurried forward.

"She is not your sister," she cried. "You say your name is Lew. Her name is Chow. I have known her for years I am her nurse. I ought to know. Stop! Be off! You are killing her!" and she began to raise her voice to a scream.

Lew-chee laid the little head comfortably on one of the short red pillows and strode from the room. He sought out one of the other nurses and sent her to take care of the "white nun" and then wandered up and down the corridors and about the hospital courts.

An inquiry he made an hour later brought him the information that the nurse was resting quietly. That, in substance, was the report for several days following. The whole hospital was plunged in deep concern. Soldiers of all shades of character, men who would rather die than show concern for their own sakes, whispered about in groups and asked anxiously of anyone and everyone whom they thought might be able to give them information. The reply was that the "white nun" had apparently suffered a nervous collapse, brought on from over-exertion. She must rest for some days and could see no one. A spirit of penitence seemed to fill the place. Each man felt a sense of personal guilt that he had arrogated to himself too much of her services. The soul that made them one seemed to have departed from their small society and they wandered apart and alone.

Lew-chee felt a double sense of guilt because he regarded himself as being the real cause of the "white

nun's" illness. He wondered that the old servant had not told the facts and his own first impulse was to reveal all. Then he realized that the secret was only half his, and that the old nurse had played the wiser part. So he went his way half-maddened by the sudden sorrow and an ever-present sense of mystery.

It was fortunate for him that other events demanded his attention. Since his convalescence, companions had been more and more allowed to pay him visits. From them he learned the facts regarding the fight and grieved with them over the flight of the plotters of such treachery. They reported also that their company had received much honour over the affair, and that the General expressed personal regret that their young officer could not be present. Senior officers also called on Lew and were most cordial in their praise. He had saved the whole army from possible annihilation, they assured him, and his courage would not be forgotten.

Then one day, shortly after his meeting with the "white nun," the story began to take another turn. The enemy after his defeat had gradually gathered at Luchow, a busy city of the upper Yangtse. There, rumor had it that Colonel Wong and the remnants of his regiment were also gathering. Later reports confirmed the rumor. Rapidly following this came the news that the now united enemy-troops had descended upon neighbouring villages and were making their way to the great salt district at the flowing wells. This would mean not only a great loss of revenue for General Chang and his troops, but the added danger that thus well supplied with funds from the salt industry, the enemy would push further north to Tzechow and

cut Chang off from the capital, Chengtu and points farther west.

With his usual energy General Chang quickly despatched additional troops to hold the latter city and prepared as soon as possible to depart in force. Lew-chee chafed at the thought that he was detained from joining in the new struggle. He had devoted his life to the dominance of the higher desires. That was his present creed and he longed for action.

Then one day a special messenger came. It was a summons from the General himself. Lew-chee sought the hospital authorities and was assured that his health was sufficiently restored for the venture. He donned his uniform, proud of its strange scars and discolourations and thrilled at the clank of his sword. A chair from headquarters was awaiting him. Another hour found him in the presence of the General and his staff.

A feast had been prepared and Lew-chee found himself seated in the place of honour at the General's left. Before the meal several speeches were made in praise of the young officer's loyalty and courage. Later, the commander personally presented him with a purse of money in the name of the army and informed him that, in future, he would rank as captain. All this Lew received as in a world of dreams. It was only when, as they sat at the feast and the old General, in words that sounded strangely different from those of the professional soldier, thanked him again for his personal kindness to himself and his family, that Lew-chee seemed to return to time and space and connect the present with the past. Perhaps it was something in the softened tones of the old veteran, or perhaps it was his eyes in milder mood, but at any rate something stirred the great mysterious springs of memory

and he saw strange visions of other days. He longed to speak and tell the man at his side of a common love and a common sorrow, but that could not be. Perhaps some day the way might open for such confidence, but time was not now. He simply bowed modestly and asked that he might be given further occasion to prove his loyalty.

"There will apparently be no lack of opportunity for all the higher virtues of loyalty, courage, consummate skill," the General replied. "The enemy are again gathering in force; they will be well financed, and will fight viciously if not valiantly."

"We can only hope that our sense of right will be our might," he added after a pause.

Lew-chee thrilled at the words. Ah, his commander, too, had the secret. Who could not fight under such a man and for such a cause? In his eagerness he asked if he might not go forward with his men at once?

"No," said the elder man gravely. "No; one duty at a time. Your first duty is to become strong. Others will come in due time. But you may report to your commanding officer as soon as the hospital authorities will permit."

Lew-chee returned to the hospital. There doctors, nurses, attendants all were attentive and thoughtful, but they were busy people with hosts of duties. He could not but remember that his cause was again in danger, and that his comrades and his company were marching away. Moreover, the "white nun" did not come near him. If she were not his sister, who, then, could she be? How could she know so intimately his life in the far-away hills—and of The Tiger? He longed to meet her again. He must know her secret.

He inquired daily as to her health and whereabouts. She was not in the hospital. She had been taken to the home of one of the missionaries that she might rest the better. She was recovering, the staff assured him, but very slowly. He was impatient to see her and impatient to join his company. Would she return in time? Could he leave without an interview? He was constantly torn between such thoughts.

He tried to solace himself by chatting with his friends, but he found his thoughts ever drifting in the direction of the "white nun." He would start in the midst of a conversation to find that a companion was speaking, asking a question, and that he had lost the thread. He went occasionally to the chapel service to which all were welcomed each morning. A Chinese evangelist conducted the services. The man had apparently a good heart, but was as evidently not very widely read. He spent much of his time denouncing idols as things of wood, straw and stone. Lew-chee felt that was rather a superficial view. To him, they were much more than that. They stood for ideals, longings, personified race-desires. Something more must be done beside the mere destruction of these images if the race were to be redeemed. Others of his talks were more practical. They pointed out the wages of sin as seen in opium-smoking, wine-drinking, gambling, foot-binding, robbery, and other vices. Those views were better, and on invitation Lew-chee once took the platform himself to denounce these evils. But to his mind these were but the evil fruits of evil roots. Newer and higher desires, he kept telling himself, must supplant and suppress these lower cravings.

There was a reading-room in connection with the

hospital, and in these days of convalescence Lew used it frequently. Some of the books were on matters pertaining to health and these he read eagerly. Others were long drawn-out discussions about "old dispensations" and "new dispensations" which he could not understand. Then one day he picked up the New Testament. He had seen many copies of it about the building, but had taken little interest in them. He had left behind him the Bible secured from Pastor Ma and the memory of what he had read seemed already hazy. What was the record of floods and temples and gardens in some far-away land to him?

But now he began to read the strange, yet interesting, story of the birth of Jesus, the flight into Egypt and the coming of John the Baptist. The courage of the latter appealed to him and he read the account again. He read on until he came to the story of the Temptation in the wilderness. This he could not understand, so he laid down the book for a time. He had noted, however, that John had been arrested. Perhaps there might be something about him a little later, and he resumed his reading. Then he came to the Sermon on the Mount. He read and re-read it, especially those parts which told of the true blessings of life. Those fitted his new beliefs about life most accurately. Here he found the great desires that should dominate the race.

"These are the forces upon which my land might be founded," he mused—"meekness, mercy, purity of heart, peace, hunger and thirst after righteousness! Jesus then knew the secret also and states it all so wisely and so well." Lew read on and on, more and more eagerly, in this newly discovered treasure-house of truth.

XX

THE LOST FOUND

ONE day as Lew-chee was thus engaged, an attendant entered. He was wanted. He left his book reluctantly. Possibly it was only another of his men calling to say farewell, and although he appreciated that, it would only again set his soul in turmoil. But the attendant did not lead the way to the public guest-room. Instead, Lew-chee found himself once more before the door leading to the small, semi-private room where he had had his strange interview with the "white nun." His heart beat rapidly as he knocked and heard a voice call from within.

He opened the door. There sat the little, familiar figure, pale but smiling. He was astonished at the change in her. The calm confidence with which she had ruled the rough men of the hospital seemed to have left her. Only her eyes retained something of the strength which had evidently deserted her body.

Lew-chee attempted to speak, but he could find no words with which to begin. The girl appeared to understand his embarrassment.

"You may leave for a time," she said to the old attendant who, as before, sat apart busied with her sewing.

The old woman looked up questioningly. The order was repeated. She left noiselessly, hesitating a moment as she reached the door.

"Come, and sit here by my side," the nurse said to the young officer, who was still standing. As she spoke she indicated the chair separated from her only by the small tea-table.

Lew-chee obeyed.

"You do not wish then to own me as sister?" she began, her lustrous eyes filling with tears.

"Sister? Own you?" cried Lew, springing to his feet. "Let us have no more of mystery. Tell me of a truth—who are you? And where is my sister?"

She looked up at the tall youth before her.

"Did I not tell you that day? It is many days ago, now, and yet you have not come to me?" Her head fell forward and a sob broke from her trembling frame.

Lew-chee was on his knees now and holding her hands convulsively.

"Told me! What have you told me?" he pleaded passionately. "You have told me nothing. Your woman told me that your name is Chow. Are you really, then, my sister? Perhaps you are married. It was stupid of me not to think of that. I had so long thought only of my sister as a girl in her teens."

"But my name is not Chow," the "white nun" said, raising her head, and steadying her voice. "I did not know my woman had told you that. My name is really Lew—and if—if you will own me, I am really your sister!"

Two heads bowed low together. There was a long silence. Neither could speak. The girl could only pour forth her soul in stifled sobbing. The youth could but kneel there convulsively clasping the girl to his breast, stroking again and again her dark, glossy hair.

The old servant-woman opened the door softly and

put in her head. For a moment she made as though she would come forward, but she hesitated and then retired gently from the room.

An hour later she came again. This time she found the two seated side by side upon the dais so wrapped in conversation and thought that her entrance was unnoticed. It was only by means of much coughing and shuffling of furniture that she made them realize her presence.

"Come here, mother," called the girl delightedly, "here is a son for you as I have been a daughter."

The kindly old face beamed with pleasure.

"This is really my brother," continued the girl. "You know well my history. Only my poor father and mother suffered. I am wealthy beyond measure. I have three brothers still in my native country, and this is my baby brother—isn't he handsome? Are you not proud of your big son?" Thus the girl chatted on full of delight as she patted Lew's hands and cheek. "And to think that I used to carry him about up and down the mountain slopes upon my back," she laughed.

They talked long into the night, and to the utmost of their strength in the days that followed. When they could not talk they could walk slowly together about the corridors to the admiration of all, for their story was soon known. When they could neither walk nor talk they could at least sit and rejoice each in the other's presence.

Naturally there was much to be told. Lew-chee had his long story since the days of The Tiger, the little Hunchback and the later days since he had gone forth in search of his sister. And the girl's story had to be told and retold, too, with its many details.

She had been dragged away that night with cursing

and brazen discourtesy. All the next day she had tramped over rough mountain-paths to one of the dismal retreats which later Lew-chee had often visited as a messenger of The Tiger. What might have been her fate she shuddered to think had it not been for the greed of that same crafty villain. She evidently was his share of the spoils, and he had from his wider experience a more remunerative market for her than the den of The Feathered Hen.

She was told repeatedly that her family had been utterly annihilated. They had dared to interfere with the robber chief's affairs and had paid the penalty. Even the three brothers had been hunted down upon the city streets and slaughtered. A similar fate and worse would await her if she dared to speak or make her escape. They were going to take her somewhere. There, if she kept quiet and played her part, she would find plenty of food and friends. If she dared to disobey, let her but look about at others and see her own fate.

A few days later she was taken down the mountain slopes by a rarely traveled route, and after a day's and night's long tramp over a plain found herself inside a great city. At the time she knew not where she had been taken, but later she learned from others that it was the capital of the province, the great city which, as a girl, she had often heard of from afar. Here she found herself in a big compound, one of nine girls of about her own age. There seemed to be several men and women about the place, all apparently well dressed and with abundance of leisure. One of the men was Wong, the self-styled "Pacifier." She could specially recall him and his effrontery.

Two months later six of the girls were told that they

were to go on a long journey to Shanghai. There the wealth of the world centred, and there they would live as princesses and queens. An old woman and the offensive Wong accompanied them. They travelled by boat down the clear waters of the Min and later the swirling sweep of the great Yangtse. Near the big city of Chungking they had anchored and the old woman had gone up the shore and into the city on some errand in connection with the expedition. From Wong they learned that she was to purchase tickets on one of the small steamers which dare the long line of rapids to the far inland port.

Some of the girls, being terrified into submission, sat silent and indifferent as to their fate. With Lew's sister it was different. She and two others had determined to secure their liberty or an end of life. Dusk came on and the old woman had not returned. The sailors who had been paid to aid in guarding the small craft were lounging lazily in a tea-house up the shore. Wong sauntered in and out, making himself particularly officious and obnoxious. The girls had laid their plans. As he came to the stern of the boat where the rice-pot was slowly cooking upon a wood fire, they seized the burning brands and rushed upon him. Little sister Lew, who was ahead, pushed her brand full in his face as he turned. With a scream he staggered back, and the girls, rushing on, pushed him over the side and into the swift current.

What became of him she never knew. She and the others dashed for the front of the boat and disappeared into the darkness. In their flight and fright they even lost contact with one another. She could only recall running on and on. Wandering through a village next day she saw a number of women crowding

into an open door. She followed, and for the first time in her life found herself in a Gospel Hall. A Chinese woman sat on the platform while a kindly-faced foreign woman was speaking. There was too much noise going on about her for the girl to gather much of what the woman was saying, but she understood the kindness and earnestness of the speaker's tone. Then the Chinese woman also spoke a few words, and at the close invited such as might wish to hear more of the message to come forward. Here, at least, was some hope of protection, and little sister Lew, waiting till the crowd had gone, went reluctantly to meet the stranger.

She told her story to receptive ears. The Western woman, an itinerating evangelist, quickly arranged that she accompany her back to the city. The Chinese woman was Mrs. Chow, a widow, and an earnest Bible-woman. She soon adopted the girl as her own, and they became "mother" and "daughter" to each other. Thus little sister Lew's own name and identity had disappeared. Why should she seek to preserve either? Her family were blotted out. To die herself, historically, seemed the only sure way to live.

She attended school for a time and learned rapidly. Then nurses were wanted in the big hospital and she volunteered. To her intense satisfaction she found in it the service she longed to give. Long since, in her new Christian environment, she had learned to forgive her enemies. Now she could go further and put love into action by serving them in their times of suffering. Thus, almost unconsciously, she had been drawn to the roughest of the men who entered the wards, and when she knew that certain of the wounded were banditti, it seemed as though her sympathy knew no bounds.

It is little to be wondered at, therefore, that her skill as nurse, together with her solicitude and sacrifice for them in days of dire need, became known far and wide among the robber-bands. She made little attempt to preach to them or plead with them to renounce their lawless ways. That she felt might be better done by others. But she spoke to them often of their mothers, their wives, their daughters and their sisters if she could get such a point of contact; and many a woman, far away in plundered village and countryside, owed life and honour to the memory of little sister Lew. "The White Nun" someone named her one day and the name stuck to her and its fame spread, as soldiers marched and robbers raided, all up and down the land.

Thus the years had passed. Mrs. Chow, grown older, had found it impossible to go on trips through the country and had come to live with her "daughter," serving her as she might. It seemed as though this would be the story for many a long day to come. Then the city had been besieged by General Chang and his men. There was nothing unusual in that. Sieges by marching armies were almost a monthly occurrence. It meant only that the hospital would again be flooded with sadly maimed and dying men.

This proved to be the case. Into the wards, after the battle, came masses of mangled men. Among others a young lieutenant had been borne along by some stretcher-bearers accompanied by a little group of anxious men. The doctors had shaken their heads as they made their examination. "He will be gone before morn" was their comment, but they did their work as brave men do, skilfully and sympathetically. The "white nun" followed the big body as it was carried back to its couch. The case was hers now. Only

her faithfulness and the mercy of the Great Father in whom she believed could save him now.

Again and again she visited him during the night. Once, on returning to him she heard him muttering in delirium. He grew worse. His temperature rose, and with it came more rambling talk. Then suddenly he had sat up and swinging his arm wildly had shouted, "The Tiger! The Tiger!" She stood for a moment stupefied. Those words, whence had they come? They had haunted her memories for years, but lately had almost died away. Then quickly memory returned and she recalled the sad scenes of her childhood. What could this young officer lying there know of that fiend?

He was murmuring again now: "Ah, my mother, my mother," he was moaning. "You have killed her. You have killed her! And my sister! My father! How dare you! . . . You demon! You Tiger!" again the voice rose and fell in its incoherent raving.

Had Lew-chee known her presence he could scarce have more explicitly made known his identity. She bowed for a moment by his side, but only for a moment. If God was to work it must be through her, and she marshalled all her forces for the fight. Every attention, every art known to her training, was called into service. It was not the struggle of an hour alone, but of many, and the odds seemed all against her. Toward morning the raving ceased and unconsciousness again ensued. Would it be life or death? She never left his side, but worked on hoping against hope. Then a long wait after daybreak brought the change. He seemed to have at least a chance for life. She tried to rest, but could not. There was but one place for her in such an hour of struggle and she was again at his side.

That was her programme for many days. No one

seemed to notice anything extraordinary in her conduct. She had done similarly, it seemed, to the staff for scores of others. As for the new comers, it was all in keeping with the reputation of the "white nun." So she kept her counsel and struggled on. She did not take even Mother Chow into her confidence. She might after all be mistaken, though she felt confident she could not be. The implications of the delirious cry, the young officer's very name and age all seemed to corroborate her hopes. But her own secret life must not be revealed without great cause, and now the life of this youth,—her brother,—also demanded the utmost calm. As he came back to strength after many days she sedulously cultivated a reserve, and it was only when she had thought him fully convalescent that she had dared voice her long-cherished hopes. Then the inevitable had happened. It was her system that had broken down under the strain.

But now all uncertainties and misunderstandings were at an end. Brother and sister rejoiced constantly in each other's presence. How proud the girl was of the tall, manly officer in his uniform whom all his men and his superior officers so admired and praised. How tenderly solicitous was the young man for the staunch little sister, the heroine of a hundred camps, now that she was his, not in dreams, but in flesh and soul! Indeed, he followed her so constantly and so affectionately that some of the patients about the hospital spoke of them now as the "white nun and her guardian Buddha."

A slight cloud crossed their horizon as the day approached that Lew-chee was to receive his discharge from the hospital and join his company. They could not think of separation. But the difficulty was only

temporary. Good news came that General Chang's vanguard had made the march successfully and held the great east road securely to the capital. Lew-chee's company was to remain at Chungking for the present, and so another month went by as though it were a day. At the end of that period, however, another order arrived commanding Lew's company to proceed to the capital at once. There was little time for decision, but it was quickly made. Little sister Lew's health demanded a change, and as there was no grave danger by the road, as it was well under control, so she should go with her brother. The hospital staff agreed with great reluctance, but felt it was assuredly for the best, and should be done.

A week later and they were well on their way. Lew-chee's responsibility was not a light one. He had been entrusted with the duty of guarding large quantities of ammunition from down-river ports, a big conveyance of mail and many loads of silver dollars. He well knew that, through their spies, the enemy would be fully aware of his movements. But he had men whom he could trust and he felt his way forward slowly, taking no useless risks. This was also most agreeable to little sister Lew. Though free in the big city to go wherever she liked, she had rarely ventured beyond its walls and the country now entranced her.

It was early spring-time. All along the route fields were bright with the yellow mustard plant, blue with bean blossoms or green with waving wheat. Here and there among the bamboo belts of the farmhouses blossoms of cherry, apple, apricot, and plum trees showed their riot of colour. Bees and birds hummed and sang over hill and plain, while all along the route endless streams of people—her people—journeyed and jostled

and jested, rejoicing at the temporary peace that was now their possession.

Despite his responsibilities, Lew-chee found many opportunities to be with his sister. She was never out of his mind and rarely out of his sight. Where the long winding path that passed for a road was not too narrow he frequently rode by her side. Conversation then had its difficulties as chairmen and other attendants were inevitably present. But then there were long evenings and even occasional days when horse and sedan abandoned, and with only Mother Chow near to guard, they could sit and relieve their souls of the pent-up emotions of the day.

It was on one such occasion as this that Lew-chee revealed some of the inner side of his meeting with Mae Jen. He had more than once told his sister of the escape from the temple, of the bridge, of the desperate moments by the precipice on the mountain-top, of the tragic accident that had left his companion bruised, bleeding and unconscious, and of the last bitter message from the hospital that she was dead, her coffin having passed out he knew not where. All this he had narrated, but he had not revealed his inner heart, his love for the soul deep-seated beneath those lustrous eyes, now closed to him forever. Now he quietly told it all, assured that in his sister he would find fullest understanding and sympathy. He was not disappointed. So fully, indeed, did she comprehend, and so tactfully did she offer consolation, that Lew began to say, jestingly, that he would henceforth be her small son, and that she must now be his "little mother"; and thus he continued to name her at times for many a day to come.

XXI

THE DEAD LIVE

MEANWHILE all unknown to the young captain his little dark-eyed spirit-companion was very much alive, in her home in the distant capital. She had indeed been seriously ill after her accident, but tender and skilful care had done their work well. So a month later, despite the fabrications of the wily old hospital gateman, she went forth, not in a coffin, but in a carefully cushioned sedan-chair, all the hospital staff waving her a happy farewell.

Her mother's speedy arrival after her own escape had been a great factor in her recovery. At first they had so rejoiced in their mutual reunion that they could find little place for remembrance of others. But the brave youth who had risked so much and so gallantly for them was not long forgotten. Through the soldier-guard he was readily traced to the big temple, and from then on many details of his history could be corroborated. Then suddenly he had disappeared. Theories that he had been lost in the big city, that he had returned to his native temple, that he had been captured by the robbers, were all advanced and exploited. The latter fate seemed to be the most probable. The Long-Gowned Brotherhood had their secret emissaries everywhere. It was quite possible they had seized him at some unexpected spot, hurried him away and long since had wreaked their vengeance on him.

Thus Mae Jen also mourned her dead, and had her sacred shrine within her heart. She, too, had her sympathetic mother confessor. The latter may not have thought that even so brave and upright a youth was to be spoken of in terms that filled her daughter's heart, but she wisely left that unsaid. Indeed at times she could wish that it had been so, rather than the bitter thought of the villainous Colonel Wong to whom a cruel fate now bound her. But the youth was dead, and Wong was an ever-present reality. With Mae Jen it was different. The tragic fate of the youth made him the more a hero. Her loathing for Wong only crowned the youth with a greater halo. His manly form and manly virtues became holy to her memory.

She went steadily forward with her studies.

"I will never marry," she said to her mother. "There is all the more need, therefore, that I receive the benefits of higher education."

During the months wherein Lew-chee was receiving his education in the stern realities of life, Mae Jen was going quietly on with her studies in the Girls' High School of the Mission, and since autumn had entered the Christian University which had recently opened its doors to women. She found great consolation in her new environment, her studies and the wider vistas and visions of life which the university opened before her. Her singleness of purpose also aided her in her zeal for progress. Among her teachers and fellow-students, her position, her poise, her progress, all won her praise, honour and popularity. Yet there was with her ever a subtle spirit of sadness which no success could completely banish. Her soul dwelt somewhere far away in those many mansions of the Christian heavens, where she doubted not, but one so

brave and honourable as her hero, dwelt very near to the Master of men.

As for Colonel Wong, her mother's ever-present nightmare had no place in Mae Jen's high mind. She had long since settled that. Her wedding day with Wong would be her day of destiny. The red bridal-chair that delivered her to his home would bear but her lifeless body. This had become her fixed resolve.

The journey from Chungking to Chengtu, the capital, is usually a matter of ten days, but for Lew-chee and his men it took double that time. But they were all glad days for brother and sister. In their newly-found happiness they had almost forgotten the three brothers away on the far mountain slopes, but Lew-chee soon discovered that "the little mother" was ready and anxious to mother them also. She was eager to write to them, to tell them all, but her brother still urged caution. These were no ordinary times in China. He, himself, had not dared to write home to his family or to his abbot lest his identity being in some way discovered, The Feathered Hen and his gang might trace them out and wreak relentless vengeance upon them for his doings. It would be wiser, he urged, that both remain silent a while longer.

In the Hospital for Women at the capital it was quite otherwise. The fame of the "white nun" had been long known there. Indeed many of the workers having passed frequently through Chungking, knew her well. Her coming for a visit to the capital would, in itself, have been sufficient occasion for a mild fervour of excitement. Now, however, the story had come of her having met her brother, a young military officer, in the hospital ward and that they were coming

together. When Mae Jen, visiting her hospital friends one day, stated that her father considered Captain Lew as one of his coming officers and that but for him the attack upon Chungking must have failed, local excitement was greatly enhanced.

Captain Lew and his company arrived at the capital without mishap. He was cordially greeted by his General and congratulated by other officers. A few there were who were a little resentful at his rapid rise, but all acknowledged his courage and skill. The arrival of money and ammunition was a source of confidence to all. The local arsenal was working night and day, but the supply of munitions seemed to grow but slowly. All felt that another struggle was but a matter of months at most and preparedness was of first importance. Lew-chee handed over his convoy and prepared to settle down for a full share in the drill and drudgery that go to grind men into fighting machines.

Meantime the "white nun" had been welcomed most cordially at the hospital. For a few days she rested, then small groups of intimate friends were invited in to make her acquaintance. Among the latter came Mae Jen, who congratulated her graciously on her own splendid service for the soldiers and the growing fame of her brother. The little nurse received it all quietly, gratefully, then turned the conversation to other things. Strange how blind we are at times despite vaunted knowledge. To the "white nun" Mae Jen was but the elder sister to her brother's loved and lost one, who could know nothing of her brother's secret. To Mae Jen the "white nun" was but a rather noted little nurse and sister to a young soldier who interested her father, but interested her not at all. Thus these two went their separate ways, each

pleased with the other's presence but little more intimate than the many others about them.

A week later and a big reception was in progress. The Hospital Household was to be "At Home" to friends to meet a wider circle who wished to become acquainted with the far-famed "white nun." General Chang's wife and daughter were to be present and assist as hostesses for the occasion. General Chang was at first reluctant to attend. Bluff soldier that he was, it was a constant bore to him to attend such functions, but he could not repress a curiosity to meet one of whom his men talked so constantly. Moreover, his women-folk were insistent. It was his duty, they told him, to honour one who had so signally served his soldiers. So the General went and found himself heading the line of patrons of the occasion. Beside him stood his daughter, beautiful in the conventional gown of pale pink silk with skirt of black. He concealed his pride in her but poorly, in fact he made no attempt to do so. General Chang was slow to adopt these new customs which the foreigner was making popular in the community. In some ways he preferred to keep his daughter secluded within his own home where they might enjoy each other free from the public gaze. Yet he could not but admit to himself that there was a certain thrill in standing by her side and noting the admiration with which she was greeted by hosts of friends.

This feeling of satisfaction deepened as the guests grew in number. Mae Jen noted the change and seemed to take special delight in touching his big-booted foot with her daintily slipped toe, then smiling up coyly her comprehension as the procession paused.

"My daughter, Mae Jen," soon came to have a real relish for him, as he repeated it to strangers. Indeed, he was almost oblivious to others, including even the "white nun," when suddenly all seemed to change. Mae Jen was grasping his arm to prevent herself from falling. Looking down, the General saw that his daughter had grown deathly pale.

He looked round for an explanation. There before him stood his promising young officer, Captain Lew. He, too, seemed to have a strange look in his eyes. It was only the incident of a moment, however. Then Mae Jen was herself again, apparently, save that her gaiety seemed to have vanished. Captain Lew, too, seemed to recover himself, saluted, and passed on his way.

But within the souls of Mae Jen and Lew-chee all seemed confusion and chaos. The young officer had advanced unnoticed in the happy excitement of the hour. Then he had noted his superior officer and halted. A glance at the pretty figure at the latter's side and he had stood spellbound, astounded. "The General's elder daughter!" These words flashed through his brain. No, impossible! Not even a sister could simulate such a poise, face, and posture. Had he not seen that little figure ten thousand times by day in thought, by night in dreams? How could he be mistaken? He involuntarily took a step forward. The dark eyes were now turned full upon him. He forgot his General, his surroundings—everything.

"Little sister," he whispered, "is it you?"

The girl's sudden turning to her father was her only reply. But that was enough. Lew had seen the eyes grow large with recognition. Impulsively he

made another movement forward, then checked himself, saluted, and passed on.

There was little further opportunity to meet that day. The two could not walk away into some semi-secluded spot as Western lovers might have done and there pour forth their souls in wonder and love. They succeeded once, however, in mutely saying in a long, earnest gaze what they could not say in words. How they longed to speak, to hear each the other's story, to review together the past! That they read in each other's eyes, but the words must wait.

It could not wait long, however. Lew-chee speedily took the "little mother" into his new secret. How she rejoiced at his new-found joy, only to immediately sadden as her brother revealed to her that there was now the possibility of even more desperate tragedy. For he now realized that it was Mae Jen—his living, loving Mae Jen—that was betrothed to the unspeakable Wong!

Intoxicated with joy at the realization that his loved one was indeed still alive, Lew-chee had returned to his quarters living in the seventh heaven. Late that night he retired to rest, but sleep would not come to him. Then in the darkness had come the remembrance of the betrothal which Wong had sworn to force Mae Jen's family to fulfil. The engagement, yes, with the elder daughter. . . . But where was she? . . . She was a myth! There was but one . . . Mae Jen was the victim of Wong's villainous designs . . . His Mae Jen, so beautiful, so pure. . . . How dare this iniquitous robber even hold her fair image in his imaginings! Lew-chee leaped from his cot and struck out wildly in the darkness.

The action seemed to arouse him from some mad

possession. He rubbed his eyes and held his throbbing temples. What was the matter with him? Was he mad or had some wild nightmare possessed him? He tried to think clearly. No, it was neither. It was an awful reality that confronted him. A few hours ago and he was aloft in ecstasies of joy. His little loved one, whom he thought dead, lived, lived, lived. He had seen her. She had smiled upon him. Her very soul had said that she loved him. And now? Now, the cold, startling fact confronted him. She, his sainted one, was betrothed to a brute, a being who was the embodiment of all baseness, a murderer, despoiler, fiend. . . . The thought was unbearable.

He groaned, and stretched out helpless hands in the darkness.

All his fine theories of life seemed to vanish again before the awful realization. His beloved . . . betrothed . . . and to that scoundrel Wong. The very fountains of his being seemed broken up. What a world! Why had the girl not died on the precipice, or in the hospital? Why had *he* not died under the old bridge or in the fight in the farmhouse? Why had they not died together in the white, surging waters as they dangled and dallied with the great broken hawser?

Surely this world was the sport of devils. The Taoists and Pastor Ma were right after all. Be the devil one or legion, he was dominating all, and laughed in fiendish glee as he saw poor humans writhe in the grip of circumstance. Circumstance! What were circumstances but the cursed warp and woof of the devil's subtle cunning? Who could withstand such superhuman craftiness? The very joys of life were but his allurements leading on to some greater doom.

Yes, mankind was but a plaything in the power of the demons. Who could save?

Pastor Ma had bidden him pray to Jesus. Jesus had power over devils. Lew-chee laughed at such credulity. Had he not prayed? Had he not prayed that Jesus would drive the devils out of this very villain Wong? And here was the answer to his prayers. For all that Lew-chee could see to the contrary, the victory was with the fiends.

Then why not join forces with them? They seemed to befriend the wicked Wong. Why not beat him at his own game? A sudden subtle joy seemed to spring within him at the thought. He could do it. He had the villain on the hip. Why not throw him headlong? Mae Jen was his. She loved him. She was here in this very city and in his power. Why not seize her for himself? Indeed it might not be necessary to use force. He would simply persuade her of her horrible fate and gain her consent to an alliance. Her heart was his. He could fight, too. Why should he not fight and vanquish for her, his own? Why fight Wong and the demons both? Why not turn the latter against so arch an enemy? He, too, would use devil's devices to play a devil's game. Let Wong beware!

Again he laughed as he stood there in the darkness. As he laughed again a pair of deep, lustrous eyes came before his visions from some of memories' vaults. In a flash of consciousness he seemed to tell her all. She was to be his. He would save her. He would fight for her to the end. For the sake of a great good, he would also descend to a little evil. She must come to him, that was all. They would together out-demon that demon. What was a betrothal? It was but a devil's device to their undoing.

But the dark eyes seemed to cloud over as he entertained these dark thoughts. A strange look of sorrow filled them. No, it was more than sorrow, it was mistrust. The eyes were turning aside.

"Mae Jen, Mae Jen!" he cried in desperation, but the face faded.

Some officer on the other side of the rough-cast partition stirred and growled out a sleepy response. Lew-chee gripped himself again. What madness was possessing him. He had been a victim to his own imagination. But why had he, in imagination, seen the trusting eyes becloud? Simply some intuition? Probably, but why such an intuition? She would not sanction such overtures to evil? Aye, that was the answer. Even in the darkness he felt his face burn at the thought. He could bear it no more. Throwing a military cloak about him he walked out into the night.

All was still in the great courtyard. There was no moon, yet the whole vault of the heavens seemed a galaxy of glory. The great dipper, the dragon, the planets, the pleiades, the "heavenly river" sparkled and shone with the dazzle of day. He thought of nights long ago in the hills. How remote they seemed now! He thought of his comrades, the little Hunchback, the priests, his abbot. Ah, yes, his abbot, that kindly soul. How long since he had thought of him. He recalled now the old man's story. He, too, in his youth had fared forth to reform the world, and for a time had seemed to succeed. Then the forces of evil had overpowered him, crushed him. These dominant forces, be they devils or desires, had destroyed him, leered at him, laughed him to scorn. He had learned the lesson re-echoed somewhere in the Christian writ-

ings, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.' "

Ah, here he was back again to the old question. Be there devils or no devils, was not life all a delusion? And back of the delusion were desires, desires, desires. His abbot had desired a better order of things in his home, his country, his nation, and was dying a disillusioned old man. The Tiger had desired money, power, the satisfaction of an appetite, and had died a dismal death. Confucius had made a temporary impression on his native state, till a neighbour sent his overlord gifts of horses and dancing girls, and then all was confusion and consternation. Was not much of the sage's life spent in passing powerlessly about from state to state? Were further comment needed, was it not written large, in the awful chaos of this his own generation?

And the Buddha? Had he not also abandoned his palace, his parents, wife, child, seeking to solve life's mysteries? Had he, too, not followed many trails to the end and found them all valueless, all vanity? What was the lesson of all these lives? Was it not, in the end, the enlightenment of the Buddha—that all life is a great sorrow, and sin and suffering, and the cause of all desire? He would abandon all this struggle, return to his abbot, confess his defeat, take the vows and leave the world to—to what?

Aye, leave the world to what? That was the question. He might himself slip away to some sheltered cloister, but, then, what was to become of his soldier-boys who had fought so bravely; his General, the courageous foreign band of physicians and nurses he had seen in the hospital struggling against disease and death, his heroic sister, and Mae Jen, his beloved?

What was to become of all these? They might follow his example. But would they? And even if they would, then could they? Would not the forces of evil, the "deacon," The Feathered Hen, the iniquitous Wong, track them down and work their will upon them? To seek seclusion and his own salvation was to abandon the world to ruin. He shuddered at the thought, and groaned aloud in bitterness, so that the sentry at the great gate paused in his pacing to and fro. Oh, that "The Laughing Buddha" should hasten his coming! Who was sufficient for these things?

Lew-chee leaned against one of the great pillars in the enclosure, and gazed into the glory above him. What were all these wondrous things? Some said these stars were the souls of the departed, waiting to be reborn. Some said they were palaces of the gods. What splendour! What grandeur! Would that this earth might be made so rich, so radiant. Why should it not? There were bright spots upon it. The little farm homes on the mountainside had many a happy hour despite their poverty. The staff in the hospital were happy despite their strenuous service. The group that had gathered to do his sister honour that day were happy. . . . And his Mae Jen, was she not still alive, and beautiful, and were not those deep eyes radiant, though she, too, must know her danger, her cruel, crushing fate? Ah, she must still hold some secret. He must see her. She might still save him.

As he stood there the first rays of dawn began to dim the stars. The lesser lights were about to disappear before the greater. In the distance the deep booming of the temple bells rolled forth. The Buddhist priests would soon be assembling for prayer. Some street hawker could be heard commencing to cry

his wares. The night-watch went by beating his rising gong. A drowsy bugler stepped forth into the courtyard and began to blow shrill and clear the brisk reveille. Officers and men shuffled out sleepily. The great throbbing world was waking up. Lew-chee passed quietly to his room, laid aside his cloak, washed, donned his uniform. A half-hour later Captain Lew was one of a marching, maneuvering mass of men upon the great parade ground. His fellow-officers said, jokingly, that he evidently dreamed of nothing but drill night and day!

XXII

BY AN EMPEROR'S GRAVE

THAT afternoon found the young officer with his sister again. He poured forth his soul once more. She comforted him as best she could and promised her good offices for a meeting with Mae Jen. The meeting came soon. Mae Jen, too, was looking eagerly for such an occasion. She had gone with her secret to her mother that night. Together they had rejoiced—Mae Jen that he, to whom her inner soul was pledged, still lived and loved her; the mother that another was come to aid her in saving her daughter from the loathsome Wong. They could not well invite the youth to their home. That would be breaking with all Chinese custom, but they could invite his sister, and did. She came, and her sweetness, sanity and spirit of service soon won for her a sure place in their hearts.

Outside the great south gate of the capital city is the Military Marquis Temple, a spot sacred to some of the most stirring annals of the vast province of the Four Streams, and indeed to all China. It is erected to the eternal memory of one of China's shrewdest military strategists, the renowned Ju-go-liang. By its side stands an immense mound. It is the grave of his master, the far-famed Lew-bee of the stirring days of the Three Kingdoms. Two centuries after the dawn of the Christian era the enlightened Han Dynasty came

to an end in China. The rightful heir, Lew-bee, was driven west into Szechwan and with Chengtu for his capital continued for many years the struggle. He was aided by his two sworn brothers of the Peach Garden pact, Chang-fay and Kuan-yu. Both died in his defense and have since been honoured with many temples, the latter, Kuan-yu, being later canonized in memory of his prowess as god of war. But Ju-go-liang was the brain of the struggle. Again and again by subtle schemes he foiled the enemy and brought victory to his master. It is most fitting that in the long centuries that have passed and others yet to come he should sit in state in his temple guarding the grave where sleeps his royal master.

The "white nun" was anxious to visit this spot. So was the young captain. Were they not also of the famous family Lew, now scattered by millions through the teeming Republic? Who more than they should thrill with pride at the memory of the great warrior king or hold in cherished memory the councillor who had served so well? The "white nun" must have a guide, and Mae Jen was but too ready to give her services. Three chairs came quietly a few days later to the big temple and three women might be seen strolling quietly to and fro reading the writings on the aged monuments, the inscriptions before the many military and other notables who are honoured in the place, and gazing up into the serene face of the shrewd old councillor. They were Mae Jen, the "white nun" and her faithful guardian, Mother Chow. Later they strayed far back into the gardens, and grove with which all is surrounded, loitering here and there, listening to the lazy calling of the crows or the soothing song of nameless birds secure within the sacred enclosure.

But an observer could scarcely have failed to mark the restlessness of one of the youngest of the little group. She gave attention to the objects about her only for brief intervals. She turned quickly at the sound of footsteps, and seemed to glance often toward the great gateways. She was at length rewarded. A tall figure in civilian clothes, but with a marked military bearing, came briskly forward. There was no shaking of hands as in western lands, but deep bows and smiles and courteous phrases in abundance showed that the welcome was most cordial.

The "white nun" and her companion conveniently dropped behind, and the youth and maiden wandered on alone. What a joy to be together! They quickly told the story of the events since their separation; they drifted back in memory to the accident on the hillside, and the man alone could tell the story of all that had happened until the maiden had awakened in the hospital wards. But yet again the conversation would turn to rejoicing over the present. How good to hear each the other, to see in reality faces and forms thought alive only in memory's mirror, to touch each the other's hand as they swung slowly side by side. But the man had other things he must say. Yet how could he break the flow of full joy by an intrusion?

After a time they seated themselves on a slope of the great mound that held the royal guest. Mae Jen made a seat of the upturned root of a great tree and Lew-chee sat at her feet. He looked at her wistfully for a moment, but the words would not come.

"What is it?" came the question from the deep, dark eyes, though the lips made no sound.

"Little sister, are you the only daughter in your family?" Lew-chee began slowly.

"Yes, I am the only child," was the brief reply.

"Aye, I knew it," he answered. "Yet I had hoped it might not be."

"You wish I had a brother," she smiled. Then her eyes filled as she added, "I had two, both older than I. Both have died in these cruel wars."

The youth reached up and took her hand gently in both his own. "Ah, little sister," he murmured, "that is sad, bitterly sad. But my thoughts were of you and the future."

"Your meaning is not clear," she answered after a pause.

"Pardon me another cruel question, but do you know Colonel Wong?"

"Yes, according to our Chinese custom, I am his fiancée."

"When will you marry him?"

"Never."

"You mean that you will break the engagement?"

"No." The deep eyes were very steady. "No, that would outrage all our national sense of right. You know the saying, 'Destroy ten temples if you will, but an engagement, never.'"

"Now it is *your* meaning that lacks clearness."

"I mean that on our wedding day, he shall have my body, but the soul will have taken its flight. I will never be his bride."

The youth bent low over the little shapely hand. He made no sound, but she saw his big form shudder. Then he rose slowly to his feet and stood looking down into her upturned eyes.

"Little sister, little sister, why did we not die together in the roaring river, or leap with the wild priest

far out into space and eternity over the precipice rim? "

"No! no!" she interrupted. "Are we not alive today? And is not life joyous for us both? "

"Ah, yes, but these apparent joys, what are they but jests of the fates that are, luring us on to tomorrow's doom? "

"But I do not believe in fates," faltered the girl.

"No, I suppose not. Your Christianity says all the evil in the world is caused by devils. Our Buddhism says they are the results of desires. But be they desires or devils, can you not see that they rule the world? "

"Christianity as I have been taught it, has little to do with devils save that we sometimes speak of our own evil desires as such," she replied thoughtfully.

"Our evil desires are the devils?" he questioned. "Then what, pray, according to your religion are the other, the better longings? "

"I am not a theologian," she replied, "but one of our common maxims is that we should overcome evil with good."

"And which are the good?" he asked eagerly.

Mae Jen did not answer immediately. Then she began to repeat the Beatitudes.

Lew's face brightened, "I have read those—I have read those," he cried. "They agree with one of my newly-found theories. But I had forgotten it, little sister, in the thought of the fate that awaits you! I sat watching the harvesters one day, and as I saw them rejoicing in their work, and I could not but believe that there were good desires, also, in the warp and woof of life. Indeed I there formed a new vision of a struggle between good and evil desires as the mean-

ing of the drama in our great province today. Wong and his banditti are the impersonation of evil; your father and his followers are the forces for good. I joined the latter and it has brought me to you. Again strengthened by your confidence that that is truth, I will go forward!"

"You are a philosopher," she answered coyly. "Do you not remember I told you that long since on the mountainside. You should come to our church and listen to our pastor, or come to our college classes and study with our teachers. They have much to say of these things. . . . But we will rejoice today and go on for the victory of the better desires," she added seriously. "The devils have not yet triumphed."

"And they shall not!" he cried, raising her gently to her feet.

"Let us join your sister," she said. "She has been very patient."

"Yes, and I have been impatient," he smiled, "but I am robbed of strength unless my soul is at rest. Now I can go forth with the power of the great Pangu who chiselled out creation, for I know the end is ours."

"Yes, the universe is on our side," she laughed.

"The universe?" he echoed, "the universe? Now *you* have turned philosopher. Good! You shall be the sage and I will be your soldier."

"No, philosopher," she replied. "But we will fight the fight together. We won once. Why should we not win again?"

Then they joined their companions.

The days and months that followed were strenuous times for the young captain. His military duties occupied his mornings, while his musings often usurped

his nights. His reestablished theory that life was a struggle between desires still found many difficulties, but with so fair a supporter as Mae Jen, it more and more won the day. She was Wong's fiancée, he knew, and in such a case he would say nothing of his own love to add further distress to her despair. Yet he felt that, in some way, true love must triumph, and he went courageously on his way. The girl understood, too, and said nothing. They must play their part in the great drama and let time and truth give the decision. And so they met and parted many times as the days passed. He saw her as she sat demurely in the church congregation, as she passed gaily among the college groups to and from her classes, and again more intimately as they picnicked in some shady grove or temple.

Lew-chee greatly enjoyed his visits to the university campus, not only because it afforded an opportunity of seeing Mae Jen, but because of the enlargement it gave to his vision and strength to his convictions of victory. Five Christian missions had united their resources in money and men, and upon a splendid site by the riverside just outside the great south gate of the city had begun to his thought a worthy work. The buildings were an excellent combination of the best in Chinese and foreign architecture and greatly delighted his eye. Wide roads, trees, flowers, small running streams, fields for football, baseball, tennis and other games which he had never known before completely commended themselves to his ideas of freedom, strength and sport. Hundreds of students, young men and young women, hurried eagerly to and fro, and scores of professors from the great foreign nations

were leading them into the inheritance of the world's vast wisdom, greatly appealed to his imagination.

After such a visit he frequently lay awake far into the night, thinking of the university as a vast irrigation system such as began at his own native city. There the waters from the mountains' snow-capped peaks flowed forth to branch and re-branch into scores, hundreds, thousands of smaller streams until the whole vast plain grew fruitful and bounteous with harvest. Here, similarly, the university fed by the purest wisdom of the nations flowed forth through its students into hundreds, thousands, millions of lives until slowly but surely the whole vast multitude would be informed, inspired, incarnated with the truest and highest ideals. What a world that would be when the farmers in their fields, the merchants in their shops, the workmen at their trades, the officials in their yamens and the soldiers at their posts should be filled and thrilled by such motives. Then indeed the highest desires would be supreme and would have free course to run and be glorified. Then "The Laughing Buddha" would truly beam with beneficence.

As he grew more intimate he strayed into the lecture-rooms of the various schools. At first the medical department appealed to him, especially the dissecting room. There he saw four robbers whom he had assisted in bringing to justice, now doing good deeds they had failed to do before. It seemed wonderful that young students, his own fellows, could thus analyze the human structure, discover its secrets and then apply these to the saving of the sick. Science in its various phases also greatly appealed to him. He wandered with delight through the museums and into the lecture rooms listening to the new revelation of

the origin and history of all things as seen through the eyes of physics, chemistry, geology, biology, astronomy and kindred studies. Through a wise arrangement of the university authorities listeners' privileges had been granted to a wider public and he thoroughly availed himself of his opportunities. The world became to him a great story-book written by some marvellous magician to be read through microscopes, telescopes and the inner eye of reason.

But his happiest hours were listening to the study of the humanities, of man, his history, his mind, his social organizations, his philosophies, his religious speculations and institutions. One day he drifted into the lecture-room of a class on psychology and listened to a lecture upon the instincts. These, he heard, were emotional deposits of past activities. New eras brought new desires, duties, struggles, and the old instincts must be suppressed or re-educated. Another day he heard a lecture on the great philosopher Kant. The theme was his Kingdom of Ends. He did not understand these wholly, but it was all food for his own theory of life. The basic thing in man was desire; each age had its ends and aims. The higher must win in the great war or the race dies. History, too, as he listened to its explanation in classrooms or read its pages for himself, showed him the world, everywhere and in all ages, as one great theater in which desires struggled for dominion.

It was during those days that Lew-chee became interested in the Christian church and its mission. He had long hesitated again to enter its doors. He had discarded the belief in devils and their struggles to snare man into evil, as he had heard the doctrine from Pastor Ma. But Mae Jen's assurance that her pastor

had a different message led him at length again to make the experiment. The church he found to be a large building and crowded to its utmost capacity. The preacher was a young university graduate of his own province, named Fuh, eloquent and full of enthusiasm. On this day he announced his subject in very clear terms. It was "The Master's Mission." What was Jesus' predominating purpose? The answer was in the words of his text, "I am come that they might have life and might have it more abundantly." Jesus' purpose, the speaker proceeded to say, was not to set up new forms of worship, songs, prayers and vestments, holy days and sacraments. These were all but means to an end. His aim was life, and more life, ever unfolding more abundantly. Every effort, therefore, that brought fuller life physically, mentally, morally, socially, politically, temporally, eternally was Christian. Lew-chee thrilled as the speaker finished. If that were Christianity, he wanted to hear more, to understand better, to give his life to such a service. He secured a New Testament and again began to read the Gospels with great interest.

It required no persuasion to secure Lew-chee's attendance at church on the following Sunday. He went, taking with him two fellow-officers and ten of his men. He was early and had time to make a few observations as the congregation assembled. In they came, schoolboys from primary and secondary schools, young men from the university (some of whom he knew), girls from the high school in neat uniform, Mae Jen and her companions, merchants, coolies, workmen, staid matrons, young mothers. He wondered at the promiscuous mixture in his land where,

though there is no caste, yet class distinction counts for much. He wondered that he saw no children, until from somewhere near by he heard the sound of young voices in song, and on inquiry learned that they had a special service for themselves.

Soon the service began. All was orderly, reverent yet full of a fine enthusiasm. The singing led by the girls' school was excellent, the reading of the lesson which ended with the significant words, "Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect," greatly impressed him. The young preacher's sermon was also greatly enlightening. His topic this time was "The Mind of the Master." On the previous Sunday he had shown what it was to be a Christian from one standpoint. Today he would approach it from another. In the words of his text it was, "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus." What was the mind of Jesus? It was this: There was a guide to this universe, one God in whom we lived, moved, had our being, all powerful, wise and loving, whom we could best describe as Our Heavenly Father. All men irrespective of colour, race or creed were His children, though at times His wandering, wayward children, children whom He would have truly sons, perfect as He was perfect. So all men were brothers, should love their Father and one another, coöperating with one another, serving, sacrificing for one another that all might be one vast family. Thus Jesus would have a new order of society based on the foregoing principles. He called it the Kingdom of Heaven, or Kingdom of God. In it there would be the fullest of liberty and equality, each striving "the utmost for the highest." At the close of the service the young preacher extended an invitation to all who so wished to meet him

in his study. Lew-chee sought him out immediately. He found in the young graduate not only a preacher but a genial comrade, a true patriot, looking for the dawning of a better day in China. Their conversation soon turned to the true cure for great China's ills. Here the young preacher reiterated his theme. To have a new China meant new men, and new men meant new minds—the mind that was in Jesus. Lew-chee had many questions regarding China's own religions, and the two talked long together. At the request of his guest the young evangelist promised to review the religions the following Sunday.

Lew-chee was again present at the church and with him a score of his friends. He found that numbers of the youth among the officers and men were anxious to listen to such themes. The young preacher announced his theme: "What is Religion?" His text answered his question: "Pure religion and undefiled before God, and the Father is this. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world." God, said the preacher, had given but one revelation to the world. Thus He had given in the main the same revelation to all. But the capacities of men and the circumstances of their age had varied. So they had interpreted the great revelation differently in detail. Buddha could see nothing but sin and sorrow in the world, could find no God, considered that all was a delusion and deception rooted in desire, and that therefore all must be eradicated, even the desire for life. Confucius, too, lived in an evil age, but he found a God and a hope of better days as he read the history of the past. He longed, therefore, to lead his country back to the Golden Age gone by. That was good, but the Sage's God was too

much a Supreme Autocrat, to be approached only by the Emperor with due ceremony. In a similar way he had made rigid relations and proprieties his rule all through the home and society. The basis of the Christian religion he had already explained many times. It united all men in one world-wide family under a common Father. It was the duty, therefore, of each to care for others, even the widows and the fatherless, and as sons of the Great Father, each to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Lew-chee hesitated no longer. That same week he sought the evangelist in his study and assured him frankly that he had at last found that for which he had been seeking long, and wanted to be a Christian. He was eagerly welcomed, and the two youths, talking together, walked the streets far into the night. They parted with the promise that Evangelist Fuh would frequently visit the soldiers' camps and there address the men and officers.

Lew-chee felt a strong conviction that one of the first great needs of his land was peace. That peace depended on many factors, but chief among them was a dependable, loyal, righteous soldiery. At present, the men in the main were mere hirelings, fighting for food and clothing, and ready to loot and oppress the people they were raised up to protect. In General Chang's army things were better, but even there many were only time-servers to rules and regulations. They lacked the spirit that made men inwardly inviolable, intelligent, invincible. Lew-chee whole-heartedly set about not only to drill his troops but to deepen their patriotism, and soul-power. Other captains and officers, aided always by the commendation of their General, caught the spirit and the duties, and days passed

quickly and joyously. Captain Lew, Evangelist Fuh and an ever-growing coterie of friends met daily in council with an occasional foreign missionary as advisor and planned great things for the church, the army and the province.

There was grave need of its effort for the enemy, "the legions of the lower desires," as Lew-chee sometimes called them, were also strengthening their position. Their leaders had taken possession of the great salt-well district at the city of the Self-Flowing Wells. Here they were plentifully supplied with money and had sent their emissaries far and wide to enlist recruits. It was part of their strategy to stir up trouble in various centers and thus dissipate the strength of General Chang's army, small divisions of which must be scattered here and there to restore order.

In these subtle plans some had discovered that the foreigner might also be played as an effective pawn. The commander at Chengtu might hesitate, knowing well the ruse to send his men on wildgoose chases to far-distant points at any and every rumoured disorder. But when a Westerner was taken prisoner by some bandit band, then the foreign nations, through their consuls, also joined in the clamour for immediate action and the General could not but act promptly.

XXIII

WITH THE GOD OF WAR

THERE was alertness, therefore, but scarcely any surprise felt when, day by day, the intelligence department reported that the old bandit-leaders were again scattering to their haunts. The Feathered Hen and his men were back once more in the mountains around Lew-chee's old home, the Spirit-Precipice Temple and the Irrigation City. Stories of their brutal depredations and those of similar bands came daily to harass the commander. Villages were being looted, farm-homes burned, heads of families held captive, women mistreated. Then, one day, consternation reigned supreme. Runners came in to report that Pastor Ma and his little colony of foreigners had been taken captive. Their home had been looted, and when the relieving force had retaken the city, the enemy had retreated, taking the unfortunate families with them. The head of the gang, it was further reported, was the wretched hare-lipped "deacon." Pastor Ma had, on learning his true character, promptly expelled him and his gang from a much-abused membership, and the former "church officer" was eager for revenge. Little consideration would be shown the captives, and the foreign consul pressed for immediate action.

To Lew-chee the news brought strange memories. He recalled the little city, its Yamen, its streets, its chapel and the dastardly scene where he had first met

the "deacon" and his gang. The thought at once sprang up within him that the task of attempting the release of the Christians lay with him. He knew Pastor Ma and his captors as the others did not, and should be best suited to undertake so serious a matter. He accordingly paid a visit to the headquarters-staff that same day and offered his services. They were gratefully and quickly accepted. Lew-chee paid a hurried call on Evangelist Fuh, a longer one upon his sister, through whom he sent a parting message to Mae Jen, sent his card to a few other friends, and with his men was out upon the northern road by dawn of the following day.

For five days he and his company travelled uneventfully. It was in the month of May. The spring was drawing to its close and summer was pressing forward. Everywhere the farmers were busy harvesting their bearded wheat, rape-plants with their oily seeds, big fields of coarse beans where leaves, stalks and seeds must be collected separately. Already the great dykes, well repaired at his native city, had been opened, tiny streams of water were everywhere threading the plain and farmers were sowing broadcast their small fields of nursery rice, later to be transplanted far and wide. Here and there great water-buffaloes drew quaint one-handed plows through the stubble or wallowed lazily in the water-courses. On all sides was happy bustle and pleasurable anticipation. There was peace in the district and work for all, even the women going about with an expectant smile as they hugged and hatched the delicate little silkworm eggs in their warm bosoms.

Then one day came a sudden change. They had come upon a desecrated district. The people had fled in despair. The fields were deserted, the village which

they entered stood a charred, blackened mass of twisted poles and broken tiles. For the rest of the day they saw only a repetition of similar conditions. Here and there about the ashes of a farmhouse or in some field they found a frightened labourer who had escaped or ventured back after the villainous wave had passed. They could tell little save that it was all the work of the hare-lipped "deacon" and his band, and that report had it that there were foreigners among his captives.

Day after day, Lew-chee went on through similar scenes. What brutes these men had become! Now and then he met fugitives who had seen the foreign families. There was a large man, a smaller one, two women and several little children. All were in wretched condition, being forced to march unceasingly with the rabble. Lew-chee pressed his pursuit more vigorously. The bandits soon took to the hills and pursuit was more difficult and dangerous. They tried to ambush him, but he, too, was a man of the mountains and knew well their manners and moods. Yet there were real dangers and he sent urgently for reinforcements. In a few days his messengers returned to say that no help was available. The main body of the enemy was marching north from the salt wells, attempting to cut the line of communications along the great east road, so General Chang had gone out personally to defend his position in that area.

The same messengers brought a letter from his sister, and through her, from Mae Jen. Both were very anxious about him. There were persistent reports that The Feathered Hen was gathering his men, that he would join the hare-lipped "deacon" and crush his pursuers. Lew-chee felt the force of the report, for

his enemy was quite evidently working westward. That meant that his company was continually getting farther away from the base and near to The Feathered Hen's lair. He redoubled his efforts and succeeded by a surprise attack in driving a wedge temporarily. Better still, to his great surprise and relief, some of his men returned that night bringing in a foreign woman, and a couple of children. It was Mrs. Ma with her own boy and her neighbour's girl. Their state was indeed pitiable. Hungry, wearied by endless marches, they had lain down by the side of the trail begging their guards to shoot them. What the latter might have done, no one could say, but just then some of Lew-chee's men had appeared on an eminence and the captors had fled for their lives. Where the others were the unfortunate woman could not say. They had been separated for two days, but they, too, were suffering from hunger, fatigue, and continuous insult.

That same evening Lew-chee received another message from the capital which wrung his heart and sent his brain wild with foreboding. His sister and Mae Jen had suddenly disappeared. They had gone out to a temple for rest and relaxation and had not returned. It was feared they were in the enemies' hands. The next day brought a special runner from Evangelist Fuh confirming the report and adding the horrible certainty that both were now firmly in the clutches of The Feathered Hen. Fuh, himself, had tried to follow them, but had been held up at the point of bayonets some miles from the city and been forced to return.

Lew-chee's head whirled madly as he read the confirmation of his fears. What should he do? Here were two foreign men, a woman and some children

still in captivity. Yonder to the west were his sister and his loved one. Should he abandon this pursuit and rush to their rescue or strike another blow for these unhappy strangers? Which way did duty lie? He called in a couple of his trusted officers, and they were for abandoning the foreigners and hurrying to the aid of the two defenceless girls. He called upon Mrs. Ma and again inquired about the foreign woman and children. The latter were of tender years, hungry, pestered with vermin, while the former was a woman of delicate health, utterly broken now by endless marchings, cold, and cruelty. What a dilemma? What was to be done? Lew paced to and fro among the forms of his sleeping men. There was no sleep for him. What answer did the Buddha give to such a quandary? None. All this suffering was the result of sin, of desire. What could Confucius say? That a man's first duty was to his own family, his own country. Should he then abandon these strangers for his kin? What would the Christ say? "Be ye faithful unto death," "Love thy neighbour as thyself!" came back the words. Yes, these were his neighbours. His sister and sweetheart—they were himself. Here lay his first duty. He would be faithful to it cost what it might. He aroused his sleeping men and announced his plans. The enemy was sore pressed. He would make a strike for it while they still slept.

The report of the capture of the "white nun" and Mae Jen was but too true. Outside the western gate of the capital city lies the famous temple of the Grass Hut. It is so named because there, a thousand and more years before, had lived one of China's most noted poets, the wandering Du-fu. There, a mile or so from

the walls of the capital, he had reared his grass hut and there written some of the songs that have survived the centuries. An admiring *literati* have, generation after generation, preserved his memory while the hut has become a hall, wide, winding, waterbound with groves and graceful walks leading alluringly everywhere. Thither the gentry of the city love to wander, especially in spring and summer, in order to catch the spirit of the changing seasons; and thither the girls had gone for a day of rest.

They had greatly enjoyed the day's retreat far from the hurry and excitement of the city, and entering their sedan-chairs started from the temple on their return journey. Suddenly, as they left the grounds, a body of men with guns had rushed through the great gateway. The girls' chairmen were roughly ordered to turn to the west and hurry their passengers forward, on peril of their lives. The girls protested, shouted and struggled to descend. It was in vain. Bayonets effectively stopped further effort. They called to each other for a time, encouraging each other as best they could, but they realized only too well the meaning of their position. They were captives of the bandit-bands. Both girls had been captive before, and knew that little could be gained by resistance. They could but be wary, watch, wait and—pray.

An hour later they entered a small village. Mae Jen recognized it at once. It was the village from which she and her mother had been taken prisoners. There was but little consolation in the fact, but at least it told her where she was. They were evidently heading for the hills. That meant that they were to enter the haunts of The Feathered Hen. She whispered this to the "white nun" as for a moment their

chairs came side by side on the village street. The latter shuddered, but made no reply. The very name brought back memories that paralyzed all efforts at speech. A moment later and the chairs were again hurrying forward. New carriers had been found and they were rushed on in the growing darkness. An hour later and the girls had lost sight of each other in the gloom. They were not even to have each the other's solace in their sadness.

When daylight dawned the next morning each girl looked out eagerly, but could see no sign of her companion. The roads were largely deserted. There was little delay in the villages as they passed through and the guards were sullenly silent. Mae Jen was mystified. She had not seen the places through which they passed before. The "white nun" knew nothing of the country for a while until gazing from her window she suddenly saw great peaks standing out boldly in the distance. She gazed again and again. Some strange memories of long ago seemed to stir within her. Could it be that she was being hurried back to the haunts of her childhood? The more she gazed the nearer came the great gaunt hills. She sank back with a sigh. What strange fate had met her there in the days of childhood! And what strange fate was it that awaited her there again? For a time she tried to turn her thoughts to other things, her hospital days, her meeting with the masses of sick and wounded men, her miraculous meeting with her brother. Her brother! Where was he now? Would he know of her danger, and Mae Jen's? Then there were the other brothers—three of them in her native city. Would she see them again? Could she, in some way, send word to them of her danger? Could they aid her should they know?

Who could help against the heartless Feathered Hen? Did he know who she was? Was it because of herself that they were now captives, or was it because Mae Jen was the daughter of the commander-in-chief? And ever the vast, frowning fastnesses drew nearer.

She would at least meet her fate calmly, bravely. She would show that she was no craven. Even the rough robber-bands could respect that. As they passed through a small village she produced a coin and asked one of her guards, a big, bronzed figure, for a cup of tea. He hesitated a moment, and acceded to her request. The chair paused to allow her the small refreshment, and as he handed her the cup his face came into full view. What a face it was! Wrinkled, swarthy, hard, with an ugly sword cut across his lower nose and mouth. The eyes that met hers were dull and lusterless. Involuntarily she thanked him with old-time courtesy. His eyes lighted unconsciously as he looked at her. She raised her eyes again as she sipped her tea. He was still looking at her with a strange gaze of inquiry. She handed back her cup. Still the deep-set eyes of the guard were upon her. He was becoming too bold—too familiar. She thanked him curtly and withdrew into the depths of her chair.

Again the chair hurried forward. The great mountains were fully visible now. How proud they stood forth, the monarchs of the plain, yet how cold, how pitiless! Again they entered a scattered village. The rough face was again at her window. He was handing her a bowl of steaming rice. She shook her head at this unwelcome freedom. She could not accept such favours. But he was saying something. "You are from Chungking," he said in a husky whisper. "I know you. I am sure I know you. Are you not the

'white nun'?" and the dead eyes lighted up as by magic.

What should she answer? Should she turn this ruffian aside with an evasion? No, she was not taught in that school. She answered quietly: "Some there are who call me by that name."

"I knew it," he whispered. "But eat. Eat quickly."

She made some attempt at complying, but she had no appetite for food, and soon handed him back his bowl.

"You nursed me," he mumbled as he withdrew and pointed to the scar. Then as the chair again hurried forward, he trudged morosely by its side.

Who was the man, she asked herself? Her question was easily answered—just one of the hundreds of suffering humanity who had passed through her hands in the hospital wards. Still a friend at such a time, even one so crude as this man, might be of value. She beckoned him closer after a time and asked where her companion might be?

He made no reply, simply shaking his head and withdrew a little further away from her chair. Evidently his gratitude did not extend to such matters. He might give food but not information. That belonged to his chief.

By noon they had reached the Irrigation City. Its streets were familiar to the little nurse as she again passed through the lines of shops. These shops and houses had changed little in appearance during the years, just a trifle older, shabbier, or it might be newer, where an old one had disappeared to be replaced by another of exactly the same low, one-story style, unpainted and gloomy. They had seemed quite

gorgeous in her girlhood days. At that very shop there she had often purchased small articles. There, on that corner, she had stood selling her bundles of boughs. And in that shop they were now passing her brother had once been an apprentice. Was he there still? Should she call, or would that but reveal an identity which it were best to hide? She looked for her guard again. He had disappeared. Another had apparently taken his place.

And thus the "white nun" was hurried through the city and scenes of her childhood. Out of the north gate they passed and were soon entering a long, secluded valley. She knew now where they were heading. They were going along the path to the temple, the Spirit-Precipice Temple, back to the very home of her girlhood. Yes, there were the long, familiar lines of graves, where lay the men and women of countless generations. That spot they had just passed was one of the resting-places for weary climbers, and that just ahead was the fatal narrow niche down which the poor neighbour-boy had plunged headlong downward to his death, his burden of coal dashing him cruelly forward. Here, and here, and here, her mother had paused or her father had given her a hand as they toiled upward or downward in days long past. Ah, that father, that mother! How she had longed to return some day to see the spot. How she had talked of it in recent months with her brother. And now she had come, but was going—where? To what fate, at the hands of the same brutal bandit-band? Old familiar haunts seemed to extend familiar, welcoming hands to her, then suddenly to withdraw. They could give neither aid nor answer.

An hour later and they were entering some of the

outer approaches of the old temple. There stood Hen with his closed, hissing teeth, and Hah with his wide-open mouth shouting surprised vengeance as they had done years before. A few more flights and they had entered the next wide portal where the four kings still reigned as of yore, save that one had lost his mighty right arm and another was without his umbrella. How tawdry and impotent they seemed to her now! And once they had thrilled her with terror.

The chair stopped, she must alight. She did so in front of the placid form and outstretched hand of Amita Buddha, the welcoming god of the western paradise. Ah, would that he were a reality, not the fiction of a long-forgotten imagination. To what sort of heaven or hell was he welcoming her now? She looked about her as they ascended another flight of stone steps leading to the main temple. How often she had raced up and down them at play with other mountain girls and boys! Now they seemed quite deserted.

A couple of dirty, dishevelled pickets in what had once been soldiers' uniforms stood up as they entered the upper doors, and attempted a sort of salute to her guards. Once inside, she was led to the right, past the central hall where the great solemn Sakyamuni sat on his lofty throne absorbed in all things save the affairs of men. He preached pity indeed, but it was chiefly pity for man's delusions and not the active pity that saves men in distress.

A few more devious turns and she entered a door. It closed behind her with a slow, long-drawn groan as though announcing some coming doom. She looked about her. One end of the room was comparatively light. She could see a small, oblong table leaning against the blackened wall. On it was a broken bowl

with a wick protruding from the cracked side. Someone had improvised a lamp, and the oil and soot were caked upon the table's surface. A wretched chair that had seen better days, as indicated by its one remaining carved arm, propped itself in turn against the table. She lifted her eyes and ran them along the dank, earthen floor. Straw was scattered about the place and there stood a crude, wooden bed without back or top where the remaining straw was strewn. The farther end of the long room was hidden in gloom. The place reeked with the odour of musty straw, spilled oil and opium fumes.

It was well that she had known poverty. A more delicately bred girl might have sickened in the surroundings. It was well that it was not Mae Jen with her more delicate rearing. But Mae Jen, where could she be? Was it possible that she was in better state? Ah, me! What could this misfortune mean? Were they simply to be held as hostages against the aggression of her brother and General Chang's army? Were they to be set up for high ransom to fill the coffers of the robber forces? Were they personally to be treated as captive enemies? She sat down on the broken chair and buried her face in her hands. For answer, tears began to flow, but she forced them back. Surely the all-loving Father knew it all. She must leave all in His keeping. She could at least show the courage worthy of her creed. Beyond that, she could but watch and wait.

She stood up again and began to explore her prison. Her eyes were becoming more accustomed to the shadows. At the far end of the place something loomed large in the semi-darkness. She went closer. It was an idol. Which one might it be? She ap-

proached and touched it. It was hard, cold and rough. It was of iron. She stepped back a pace and peered up into the great grimy features above. It was Kwan-yu, the famous god of war. Yes, there could be no mistake. She remembered him now as he stood in a niche of the old temple. This room could not have been there then. It must have been some later construction.

Then memory suddenly came in with its flood of scattered recollections. This was the work of The Tiger. It was he who had built it. It was his private retreat. Here he had lived, smoked his opium pipe, met brutal bandit leaders, plotted his cruelties. Here, too, little Lew-chee had served the wicked old priest. On this dank floor he had grovelled and groaned in terror at subtle iniquities he was forced to witness. The place seemed haunted with painful memories. And this big, brutal idol! It had stood by and leered at all this loathsome evil! But wait! Had it not also been her friend? Was it not within its heart that Lew-chee had found the tell-tale paper bearing her sale by The Tiger to Wong Ngan-kwei—Wong the "Pacifier of the Nation." What a name! What derisive sarcasm lay in the words! She recalled the wretch, his insults, his slimy sneering, his last appearance as brand in hand she had rushed upon him, had seen him fall headlong into the rushing river. Was he dead? She had often wondered, and if so, whether she was to be held accountable for his death? Whenever the thought came to her she had concluded to leave it all in the hands of the Father. Something seemed to tell her that she could trust His justice and His mercy.

She wandered around the old idol, caressing it in her loneliness. Yes, it was hollow. She could easily

stand inside the big, bulky form. Would that she might hide there against her pursuers, but that would be impossible. And he, too, had felt the tooth of time. Rust had eaten great holes in his armour which, looking now toward the light, were all too visible. She could thrust her hand through some of them. She left him and examined the ancient alcove where he had stood. There were the old posts. Here, at the rear, had been a small half-window. It was closed now, covered with the cobwebs and dust of years. She turned again to the idol and peered into its huge, hollow heart. She would creep in and sleep there, when the darkness came. That would be better than the creaky bed with its infections. Yes, they would be friends again. She would nestle up to the old, rusty warrior. If they were cruel to her, perhaps she would die some day, within his dark, protecting heart.

XXIV

THE "PACIFIER"

SUDDENLY the door of her prison opened. Peering through the holes in the idol's armour, she saw a figure enter. It was a woman. It was Mae Jen! With a little cry of joy she ran forward to greet her. Was she well, was she safe, had no harm befallen her? Her replies were all in the affirmative. Her chair had evidently come by the same route but was an hour or so in the rear. For a moment the two girls forgot their danger in the joy of reunion. As the first flood of questions ended and the comfort of companionship came again, the "white nun" began to lead her friend to her new fields of discovery. The table, the chair, the couch, the great idol, were all surveyed. So was the older alcove with its pillars, its window of other days, its very cobwebs. They were in sore straits, but they would make a little world of it and—wait!

Thus two days passed. They busied themselves with trifles about their new home. They asked the guard for some water in order that they might cleanse the place, and for some covering for their cot. But the guards were non-communicative and gave only sullen refusal. The only things that were provided were some gruel rice and rough vegetables, and these only sparingly. But the girls made the best of it. With some of the straw of their bed they made brooms and swept the floors and walls. With other whisks and a little rice-water they scrubbed their table and rickety

chair. With infinite patience they dissected their couch, ridding it of its insect-invaders. They even set to work to polish the armour of the grim old god of War.

Yet in the midst of their attempted cheerfulness was the ominous lurking danger of which they were ever conscious. What was their capture to mean? What were the home people doing? Had they discovered the truth, and how, and what could they do? General Chang was east with every man of the troops that could be spared. Lew-chee had but few men and was seeking to save others in distress. The road they had come seemed infested with robber-bands, their guards posted in every village. They were constantly watched here day and night. That they knew by the whisperings and lights that passed regularly to and fro. Their captors were probably trying to break down their courage. They must fortify themselves, by trying to forget. The "white nun" would teach her companion nursing, and Mae Jen would introduce her fellow-prisoner to the wonders of science, history, and art, as she had learned in her university courses.

But that day, as they sat resting on their cot, their plans were suddenly interrupted. There was a commotion at the door. It swung open to its full width to admit an officer and then closed again with its dismal groan. The man stood still for a time until his eyes became accustomed to the shadows of the place. Then seeing the chair and table near by he sauntered slowly forward and sat down. Then stretching out his high-booted legs he swung his sword upright between his knees, and leaning forward with his chin upon the hilt, gazed boldly at the two prisoners.

Apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, he leaned

back nonchalantly and lit a cigarette. This done, he turned again to the two girls.

"You are Miss Chang," he said, indicating with a nod of his head Mae Jen, who sat ten feet away from him across the room.

Mae Jen made no reply.

"I mean you," he repeated in a slightly raised tone, and pointed with his sword in her direction.

Still no reply came to answer his discourtesy.

"Very well," he said, "it is a matter of indifference to me whether you speak or not. I just dropped in, as it were, to say I had planned a little surprise for you."

There was another pause as the man adjusted his cigarette and spat deliberately in the direction of the "white nun."

"This is my wedding day," he added with a chuckle. "Perhaps you will be slightly interested to know that since it happens to be yours also." Thus speaking, he long and cynically looked toward Mae Jen. She looked him full in the face but answered him nothing.

"I have somewhat the better of you," the man went on. "I have seen you before, but this is the first great privilege you have had to see me. You see before you your betrothed, your beloved, your long-longed-for lord and master."

Mae Jen sat as impassive as the god of war in the shadow.

"Yes, allow me to introduce myself. I am Colonel Wong. Some friends of mine have carried you here for our nuptials. I regret of course, very deeply, that you did not have the usual red chair, the privilege of the bride. But I believe that you do not fully hold

to our older customs. That being so, I will, of course, waive other non-essentials."

Mae Jen's silence apparently was disconcerting to Wong and he fidgeted with his sword-hilt.

"Of course," he continued presently, "being a gentleman and a high officer in the service, it might not have been necessary to disturb the usual order of things had it not been for your father's and mother's duplicity in the matter."

Mae Jen reddened slightly at the insult made to her parents, but still kept silent. Wong reddened and bit his lip in growing anger.

"You evaded one hymeneal occasion yourself," he went on. "Once before my friends carried you out for the great event, with your dear mother to witness the happy consummation. But the faithlessness of a wretched priest and the interference of an accursed youth set you free."

Mae Jen shuddered at the announcement. It was Wong, then, that had planned their capture, and his motive now was clear. Words sprang to her lips in denunciation of his cowardice, but she did not utter them.

"It should be a consolation to you to know that the priest who laboured so sacrificingly in your behalf on that occasion has since had an appropriate reward at the hands of my men," Wong said, pausing a moment to watch the effect of his words. "The doom of your daring youth will follow in good time," he continued. "To deny or to defy me is to die!"

"I have told you these few incidents," Wong added, "as an introduction to the temper of your new lord, and so that you may know that, this time, there will be no rescue by priest, fool or fairy. If you fulfil your

obligations calmly and quietly as law and duty demand, then all will be well, for I can also be loyal to my own. If you refuse, then beware my fury. The devils will first have their merry dance, and even then, in the end, you will not evade me."

He lunged forward, anger gleaming from his snarling teeth as he cried: "Speak, you, and speak quickly. Which shall it be?"

Mae Jen lowered her eyes, but still kept silence.

Wong rose and started to move toward the door. Then he bethought himself and sat down again, turning, as he did so, his glance toward the "white nun." He was visibly raging within.

"And you, you slave. I have something to say to you before I go. You think I do not know you, but I do."

He looked at her with hatred in his every feature.

The little nurse despite herself uttered a suppressed scream. She had recognized a strange familiarity about his acts and accents as he talked to her companion. Now recollection and realization came back swift as a lightning-flash.

"Wong Ngan-kwei, Wong the 'Pacifier of the Nation,'" she groaned.

"Ah, you recognize me then. So much the worse for your sleek skin. Yes, I am your friend Wong. I am the companion of your merry days, and a deep debt of gratitude I owe you personally. You plunged me into the river and gave me a little souvenir here which I will now be happy to return," as he spoke he pointed to the scar upon his cheek left by the burning torch.

Mae Jen lifted her head and looked at him with scorn. She had heard the "white nun's" tale from

her own lips and well knew the significance of the scene that was passing before her.

The "Pacifier" noted her revulsion and turned again upon her.

"Ah," he said, "you also are wise in your wisdom. That, too, is well. You will neither now nor in future suffer from disillusionment. I am a man who hesitates at nothing. You have still a few moments left in which to make your decision."

Then he turned again to the "white nun."

"With you, you slave, I have a double score. Think you that I do not know that the dastardly youth, who has flouted me more than once, is your brother? But of him in good time. We had pity on you. We bought you from The Feathered Hen and would have sent you to the joys of a great city. Very well, you made your choice. Now you shall have it. Allow me to congratulate you also. This, too, is *your* nuptial day. Even slaves have nuptials."

He laughed a hideous chuckle and rising, strode to the door.

"Call in the chief!" he commanded.

There was much shouting and running to and fro about the temple. The "Pacifier" walked to and fro near the door. The two girls clasped hands and whispered encouragement to one another. They looked about, but in vain, for any way of escape. Looking towards the great, grim idol the "white nun" thought she saw him move in the growing darkness. No, it could be but a delusion. His vaunted valour did not extend to maidens in distress. She looked toward the door again. A big, hulky, pock-marked form, with one closed eye, was entering. Again she uttered a little, smothered scream. She knew him well,

even after the flight of years. It was The Feathered Hen!

The "Pacifier" led him forward a pace or two and then sat down again upon the chair.

"You served me better than you knew this time, chief," he said, addressing the big, hulking form. "In serving me well you have served yourself."

"My men serve well," muttered the big lips, attempting a sort of self-depreciation.

"No, they do not do so always," continued the "Pacifier." "They served me a scurvy trick the last time this lady came to visit me. They let a low-down priest and a mere child outwit them."

"Ah, I was not present then," answered The Feathered Hen. "But we paid off the weaklings well next day."

"But even *you* let the coffin trick pass you," continued Wong, evidently enjoying the chief's discomfort, and at the same time working him into a frame of proper dependence. "You let the coffin pass. A few rustics outwitted you."

"Those two old hags will yet suffer for it," fumed the bandit. "They hug the temple of the big city. But some day you will have the city and then they will have to meet me."

"Enough, chief, enough. This time redeems all past blunders. And you shall have your share. What think you of yonder silken missie?" he grinned, pointing to the "white nun."

The brutal head lifted its eyes and leered toward the girl.

"Uh!" he grunted, "what does this mean?"

"You recall the old opium priest, Chang, The Tiger?"

The big head nodded.

"You remember the job you did for him in cleaning up the Lew lot out here on the hill?"

Again a silent nod from the bandit.

"There was a girl in the loot. You sold her to us. She escaped and got into the graces of the foreign devils. They fed her well and taught her to heal disease."

He paused a moment and looked at the "white nun." She was sitting motionless by her companion.

"You are getting old now, chief," continued Wong. "Your leg troubles you much. You need a nurse. Ha! ha! We paid you only part of the price at that time because of our loss. Today I pay you in full. Yonder silk-faced slave is the girl. She is your share of the spoil. She is your property!"

The big fellow hunched his shoulders and made an attempt at a grin. The little "white nun" hung her head in bitterness of soul.

"And now my sweetheart," he said scornfully, turning to Mae Jen, "are you ready for the wedding procession with your beloved in true foreign fashion?"

Mae Jen made no reply, but gave Wong a look of infinite scorn.

The "Pacifier" winced and reddened.

"You defy me still," he sneered. "So be it. You have had your head filled full of this foreign, Christian education. I will show you some of ours, for your edification. Ours guarantees graduation swift and sure."

"Call in those three dogs," he said, turning to the bandit chief.

A few minutes later and three badly-frightened men appeared. Their unkempt hair, their badly torn and

scanty clothing, their general look of tension, all told plainly that they had been roughly handled.

"The chains," called out the "Pacifier."

They were brought in, a clanking, rusty jumble of iron, and stretched before the three prisoners.

"Down," commanded Wong.

"Kneel, kneel," echoed two or three assistants, enforcing their words with savage pummelling and thrusts of gun-butts.

Down went the prisoners, their naked knees upon the rusty chains, their hands securely tied behind them.

"What's your name?" demanded Wong, addressing the oldest of the three as he knelt painfully by his side.

"Lew, your highness."

"And the others?"

"They are named Lew also, your highness. We are three brothers."

"That's true so far," he chuckled, grinning leeringly at the "white nun." "A nice family reunion for a wedding."

"And you had a father and a mother in your family, I suppose?" he continued, turning to the eldest who spoke for the others.

"They're dead, your honour, they are both dead these many years," replied the unhappy man.

"Died in their fat palaces of luxury, I suppose?" continued their tormentor.

"No, your highness, they died here—here on the hills. They were poor people—peasants."

"Again you have told the truth. Poor, miserable, accursed curs they were. They dared to disobey the mandate of their betters. Speak. What happened to them?"

"I do not know, your honour. I was not at home."

"Strike the villain. How dare he lie to me."

The attendants knocked the unfortunate fellow forward and then jerked him back again into position.

"What happened them, I ask you?"

"Some say they were killed, your highness," he faltered.

"Killed, yes, both of them, the swine." Again Wong leered at the "white nun."

"Who killed them?"

"I don't know, I mean I am not sure, I—" came the terrified reply.

"Liar!" came the angry retort, "speak quickly, or you follow their fate."

"Some said 'twas The Tiger and The Feathered Hen," came the hesitating reply.

"Right again. There is the noble chief by your side. Look at him. Bow to him, all three of you."

The unfortunate brothers did as they were bidden, stirring restlessly on the cruel chains that gnawed into their knees as they did so.

"And you had another female in the family, hadn't you? Answer quickly," interrogated Wong.

"We had a younger sister."

"Where is she?"

"She is lost—dead. We have never heard of her since."

"You lie. There she sits, yonder. The smaller, skulking creature. Look at her, the three of you. Fine dog in sleek silk, eh?"

The unfortunate brothers made no reply, but gazed upon their unhappy sister. Their mute eyes revealed nothing. How could they know her? As for the wretched little sister, a great sob escaped her lips.

How often she had dreamed of a home-coming and a reunion with her brothers—and this was it! Ah, God, the Father, did He still reign in the heavens, or had He gone on a far journey? She bowed her head in her hands and wept silently. Mae Jen sat cold and rigid before the brute she knew well was seeking to break her will. Wong sneered insinuatingly and continued: "Well, that's her. She has come home with happy news for you. This is her wedding day. Her Christianity teaches her to love her enemies, and she has fallen in love with hers. She is going to wed the noble chief yonder, that you call The Feathered Hen. You are thus highly honoured—marrying into official circles. Bow to him again, you swine."

A titter ran around the group of attendants at Wong's wit. Even the big, brutal face of the bandit-chief relaxed slightly. The three men bowed again.

"Now the point of this happy little reunion is that we want money for the nuptials. We want ten thousand dollars, not one cent less!" Again the "Pacifier" grinned complacently through his yellow teeth. Again the crowd tittered and the unfortunate men writhed on their chains.

"We are poor men, your highness," answered one of the brothers. "We have but small shops and the officials have taxed us constantly. The Long-Gowned Brotherhood has borrowed all we had several times. We have wives and children with hungry mouths. We have no capital of our own. Our little stocks are mortgaged." As he spoke the man bowed again and again to his tormentor.

"Well, you dogs," said Wong. "As a sign of his great esteem for his new relatives the noble chief is willing to make the sum one thousand. But that must

be paid by tomorrow night. "You," he continued, turning to the eldest brother, "will remain here. The others will find the treasure. It is your head against their hustling."

The three men groaned but did not speak.

"Enough of that," said Wong, nonchalantly leaning back in his chair. "There is another little scene to lend charm to this doubly-delicious occasion. You have a charming younger brother, I am told?" He looked again at Mae Jen.

"We have a younger brother, but he, too, has disappeared," came the reply.

"Ah, that is unfortunate. It would be such a pleasure to have him present at such a festival. The fine foreign custom, moreover, I am told, requires a groomsman. The chief and I could have shared him between us."

As he spoke Wong looked significantly toward the door. There was another commotion and through its low portal came a tall, stooping figure. A glance showed that he was wounded, and almost naked. His arms were bound behind him and heavy chains dragged from his bare feet.

XXV

"THE LAUGHING BUDDHA"

MAE JEN looked at him. He lifted his head, and for the first time a startled cry escaped her lips. It was Lew-chee.

"Ha, can it be possible that this is your brother?" laughed Wong.

The three men looked up, then bowed their heads in silence. The little "white nun" also looked through her streaming tears, shuddered, and groaned aloud. Her nerves, but recently so sadly broken, were again rapidly giving way.

"A younger brother should not stand while his elders kneel. Just let the gentle groomsman take a place beside them."

A man strode forward and with a savage jerk forced Lew-chee to his knees on the rough chains beside his brothers. The man was the hare-lipped "deacon," radiant in Lew-chee's uniform and with the latter's sword by his side.

"You see I am a real magician," sneered the "Pacifier," turning the ugly, scarred face full upon Mae Jen. "Even your Christianity cannot perform miracles mightier than mine. Perhaps you would like to have your dear mother and your silly, old male parent here for the occasion, and a pastor or two to perform the ceremony? Well, as to the latter, you may put your heart quite at rest. My friend here," and he bowed towards the "deacon," "is an officer in

high standing both in my army and in the Christian church, and will see that the proceedings are properly solemnized."

The "deacon's" ugly hare-lip expanded at the sally, and a snicker went around the crowd.

Lew-chee's appearance requires but brief explanation. His night attack had been crowned with success. He and his men had located Pastor Ma and the other captives in a wretched straw hut among the hills. A sudden attack had surprised the bandit gang—and sent them scurrying for shelter. A few minutes later and Lew-chee was assisting Pastor Ma, the poor tired woman and badly frightened little ones to some measure of comfort. They were gathered together in haste and started under strong escort back into safer territory. The party had got safely away and Pastor Ma, with his friends, had been welcomed by Evangelist Fuh and other foreign workers at the capital, where everything possible was being done for their comfort and recovery.

But things had turned out otherwise with the young and gallant captain. He, with a small guard, had been following well to the rear, when suddenly, in the dense darkness just before dawn, a company of the bandit-braves leaped out upon them. The odds were overpowering. Lew-chee and his loyal men had fought valiantly for their liberty, but all in vain. In ten minutes the fight was over. Dead men lay about, showing the price that had been paid, but the bandits paid little attention to that. The real object of their strategy had been attained. The young captain was in their hands, wounded but still alive. The joy of the hare-lipped "deacon" was complete. He knew the rendezvous of his chief and led the captive there in tri-

umph. The rest of the drama was in the diabolical hands of the "Pacifier."

Lew-chee was a pitiful sight as he knelt there before his cruel captors. He knew that the two girls were prisoners, so was not greatly surprised to find them there. He could only pray that in some strange way they might still meet with deliverance. As for himself, he knew there would be no mercy for him. To ask for sympathy would, he knew, only incite ridicule and, if possible, a more brutal torture. He could but show true courage, and await his fate in silence, and with fortitude. He could not have spoken even had he chosen. The "deacon" had seen to that, by the usual method of inserting a stone inside his jaws. So he glanced out bravely from his tired eyes and sent to his captive loved ones what message he could, of hope and cheer.

The "Pacifier" seemed to be searching his cruel brain for some scheme to which, while sufficient to wreck his vengeance on his victim, would, at the same time, terrify Mae Jen and her companion into abject submission. His face at length lit up in a seemingly insane delight and he began to talk again.

"Welcome, my trusted lieutenant, to this happy meeting," he said mockingly. "Your coming was most unexpected to these ladies, if I may speak for them, and doubtless for yourself. I need not at this time recite the loyal way in which you have supported me and advanced my cause, both publicly and privately, in the past. All is well known to you and to the present company.

"You came, scarcely expecting to act as groomsman today to the noble chief there as he weds your sister, and to me as I put my all into the dear hands of my

fiancee." He looked from one to another as he spoke.

"No? Well, I thought as much," he continued in mock courtesy. "You need not apologize. I am not well up on these new foreign customs myself. So since you, no doubt, will be gratified to dispense with them, I will waive them also. We will proceed according to a very old Chinese custom, and as the darkness is coming on we will proceed at once.

"My dear 'deacon'," he said significantly, turning to the latter, "kindly have a few of your followers attend the groomsman lest he faint from a too great exertion in my service; and you, yourself, might draw your sword as a special mark of high honour.

"The good old custom I have just referred to, is that of giving gifts especially to the bride and groom and their friends. As you have not brought anything special in the way of gold, or silver, or jade ornaments, we will waive that point also, and accept what you have. We must be punctilious as to propriety and etiquette, however, and will do all according to that time-honoured custom, now discarded by the new Republic, but in high honour still among some of us who affect the old-fashioned ways. You will know it when I mention it. I refer to the picturesque, old, slicing process."

Brutal laughter ran round the room as the significance of the "Pacifier's" purpose became evident. Those without, crowded in that they might see the diabolical process again, a human being slowly sliced to pieces. Lew-chee's brothers groaned afresh as they still knelt by his side on their chains. The little nurse cried out piteously at the new terror. Mae Jen sat petrified with horror.

"Now, we should be careful to suit our gifts to the slightest whims of our guests and their friends," Wong

went on in slow, diabolical tones. "You, chief, inasmuch as this rascal protruded so graciously into your affairs, by setting free your prisoners, would seem appropriately rewarded with his nose."

Again a burst of boisterous laughter from the crowd, while the big hulk of The Feathered Hen shook as he chuckled inwardly.

"As our benefactor so persistently leant an ear to Mother Chang and her meek old mate, we will send them an ear each in an appropriate envelope. I, whom he served so faithfully as secretary should, unless someone else has a better claim"—here he leered at Mae Jen—"I should have his hands."

"You being such an ardent man of religion, my dear 'deacon,' will assuredly want the heart" . . .

Another brutal guffaw burst forth. As it ceased the cruel voice continued: "As for the lying lips and tongue, the devils shall have those, and the dogs the carcass."

"Commence," he ordered crisply as he rose to his feet.

Three bandits sprang upon Lew-chee at the word of command and the hare-lipped "deacon" drew his sword. The little nurse leaped from her companion's arms and threw herself upon her brother. Mae Jen fell at the ruffian's feet.

"Save him! Save him!" she cried, "and I will yield. I will be your slave for life. Save him! Save him!"

A single torch which someone had lighted shone full upon the "Pacifier's" face. His yellow teeth and mouth were puckered in a diabolical grin.

"Too late!" he sneered. "Chief, take your property. I take mine!"

The hulking chief stepped forward. The "Pacifier" stooped to seize his prey. But they never reached their goal.

A new voice rang out suddenly and clear in the gathering darkness. It was the voice of rifle shots.

The hulking form of The Feathered Hen fell forward with a heavy thud. The body of the "Pacifier" was seen to sway and reel to one side.

Again the voice spoke and the hare-lipped "deacon" rushed from the room with a scream.

Everyone looked toward the iron image. The idol had spoken, sharp and sternly, with words of fire as became a god of war. Once again a message flashed from his sides, his broad breast, his heart, and at each word someone writhed upon the floor of the ghastly room.

With a shout of terror the band broke from the place. As they did so, a shout was heard without.

"The 'white nun'." "The 'white nun!'" Stand by those who would save the 'white nun!'"

A sudden clash of arms, shots, shouting, cries of surprise and pain followed. As quickly as it had come, it ceased. Lights began to enter the room. As they did so, three men stepped out from the protecting care of the great, grim god. The first was a man with a wound over his nose and chin. It was the guard who had accompanied the "white nun" on her journey. Through him the god had spoken.

He had recognized the soldier's friend as he had travelled along by her chair and knew well her possible danger. He had not dared to speak then or even betray any special interest in her. But he could not forget his benefactor and slowly passed the word to those who had known her unselfish services. In a

few hours a band of twenty or more had come together and in secret council sworn to save her at any cost. Hearing that danger lurked for her at the temple they had made their way the next day up the long hill. With the aid of the old abbot, to whom they made known their plan, three men had effected an entrance through the long-unused window at the rear of the iron idol. The others had ranged themselves outside ready to strike when the signal was given. The success of the plan had been complete.

The flaring torches revealed a weird scene. The three brothers were standing with their backs to the wall absolutely terrified. Lew-chee had risen, the little "white nun" clinging sobbingly to his stalwart frame. Mae Jen lay prone upon the dank floor. Near her lay some other human forms. Two were common bandits. One was the brutal form of the notorious Feathered Hen, another the villainous Wong.

The rescuers went rapidly to work. Quickly they cut the bands that bound the brothers and restored Lew-chee's wearied limbs and tongue to freedom. Mae Jen they lifted, as tenderly as rough men may, and laid her on the crude couch, while the "white nun" hastened to her side. The two bandit-braves were found to be quite dead. So was the dreaded Feathered Hen. The nefarious Wong, though badly wounded, was not dead and groaned as the rescuers rolled him over. They would have finished him with curt ado had not Lew-chee put forth a restraining hand. As it was, they secured him safely with chains and let him lie.

A moment later and all were standing by Mae Jen's side. The first thought was that she was dead, she lay so still. But the "white nun's" report was reassur-

ing. She had not been wounded. She had simply collapsed at the awful tragedy called up by her tormentor. She recovered by degrees and there, in that strange room of the old temple, rescuers, relatives and lovers participated in a strange scene of rejoicing as the old grim iron image gazed dispassionately down.

Out and to the east of the main temple is an eternal spring of pure, clear, crystal water. To its right stands a small structure with curving roof and red, welcoming pillars. It is a natural cave, where the huge rocks hang in solid grandeur. Here some artist has placed "The Laughing Buddha"—the Buddha-that-is-to-be. He has hewn him with splendid skill and fond imagination from the living rock. His big, bulky body speaks unhesitatingly of abundance of food, man's most prime necessity. His broad face, wreathed in smiles, tells plainly of peace and prosperity, while little children peeping from behind his plump cheeks and laughing up into his beaming countenance reveal posterity, play-life, purity. Here is no emaciated ascetic scarred by long vigils, but one who surveys full-orbed the present and the future, a picture of innocence, intelligence and intense humanity.

Here the "white nun" had her patients brought the next day. On a cot in the sunlight lay Mae Jen, weak yet wreathed in smiles at the new life that opened again before her. Lew-chee still suffering slightly from a wounded arm and the rough usage of the past days paced placidly to and fro, chatting casually to Mae Jen and his old abbot, who sat at the feet of his Buddha. At the other side of the small structure, and in the shadow, the "white nun" was busied over another cot and its restless sleeper. True to her in-

stinct, she was seeking, despite his past, to nurse back to life, her cruel persecutor, Wong.

As she touched his wound with fingers of mercy, he rose suddenly on his arm and cursed her.

"Let me die," he snarled. . . . "If only I had strength to rend you!"

Looking about him he saw Lew-chee, and then Mae Jen. The sight seemed to give him added strength and he sat upright.

"Ha!" he shouted through his yellow teeth. "You think you have her now . . . but . . . I have a bomb yet to burst. . . . What was The Tiger's name? . . . Was it not Chang! Chang!! Chang!!! Ask her accursed father, your General, where his elder brother went! . . . The Tiger is her uncle! . . . Now mate with your vile father's murderer, if you dare!!!"

"Ha! ha! Ha! ha!" he cried again as he saw Lew-chee pause. Then he hurled himself headlong upon the stone-flagged floor, struggled for a moment, and then died. No one stirred. The abbot bowed and murmured his rosary.

A guard kicked the corpse as he bundled it out.

"Amita Buddha! Amita Buddha! Ah, Thou Buddha of Boundless Light!" murmured the aged man as he rocked to and fro. Then he paused and looked full upon Lew-chee.

"And now, my son, you will return from your wandering," he said. "You will come again into this haven of rest. You have seen that the world is all emptiness, delusion, deception, torment."

He paused, awaiting a reply. Lew stood silent for a time, then going slowly forward seated himself at the old man's feet.

"Nay, master," he answered. "Nay, that is impossible!"

"Ah! Still blind, still blind," murmured the old man, gazing at him in pity.

"Nay, master, not blind," replied the young man. "Indeed I am assured that I am now more fully enlightened."

The old man shook his head mournfully.

"Listen, master," continued Lew. "You, too, in your youth, went forth, eager to reform the world. Like Confucius you glowed with the thought of again restoring the golden age of the past. That was good, my master, noble . . ."

"Nay, nay," replied the elder man. "It was but delusion leading to despair."

"Not so, my master! Let youth speak again. You stopped too soon. Even had you struggled to the last, and lost, it would not have been in vain. I have attained to a new enlightenment, my master. It is true that desire is the basis of all life, but there are desires good and bad, or better and best. This world is a war of desires. . . ."

"Aye, and we are the victims. All is vanity."

"Not that! Not that!", continued Lew-chee. "All desire, at its root, is good. These have fulfilled a purpose sometime, somewhere, in the long life of our race. But men pervert them and then become their slaves. Yet, on the other side, are desires which are foretokens of a fuller, better life. It is ours to ally ourselves with these, and fight for them to the end."

"There will be but one end. There has never been but one."

"There again you err, my master," Lew persisted. "You dwell too much on this present age. A golden

age will yet come out of all this carnage. It lies before us, not behind. A greater than Confucius has come. Our Sage confined himself only to a few chosen men as examples for the many. This Greater One sought and found the multitude, and armed each one for the fight."

The old man paused in his murmuring but kept silent.

"Here in this struggle we have had The Tiger, The Feathered Hen, the poor wretch who has just breathed his last," Lew-chee went on. "They have been servants of the lower desires that degrade, debase, and deceive. But on the other side are the Christian Church, General Chang, his daughter, my little sister here, whose generous sacrifice to soldier friends saved us all this day. These masses can all be touched by such sacrifice as that. Some day, slowly but surely, they will arise, as today, and fight for the right, the true, the beautiful, and the good!"

Still the old man sat motionless. Then turning to the great image above him, radiant in the sunlight, he murmured: "Perhaps, perhaps. A thousand years from now, he will come, and with him will be peace and plenty."

"Master, master, believe me," cried Lew-chee, placing his hand reverently on the aged abbot's arm. "The Hope of which you speak *has* come. He came two thousand years ago, but we have not known it. He is the Christian's Saviour, the Way, the Truth, the Life and Light of the World. The world as yet has but little accepted His leadership, but in so far as they have, love, liberty, life, have flourished. I am for Him—His man to the end!"

The old man gazed long and earnestly into the

beaming face above. "Aye, it may be. It may be," he said, as though to himself. "He sees something I cannot see. My eyes are too dim with age and waiting. . . ."

"But go your way," he added again, after a pause. "All men seek the Way. The Lion of the Sakyas may have found but one. Yet to me it has brought peace and rest. I must follow it to the last!"

Five years have passed since the tragic scene was enacted in the old temple of the Spirit-Precipice.

Two dagabas crown the hill just east of this abode of the Buddhas. One holds the ashes of the little Hunchback, the other those of the aged abbot. Farther up upon the mountainside stands a grave with a new, square slab. The inscription records that there lies a man named Lew and his faithful wife who died, but says not how. A tall youth, in military uniform comes once each year to the dagabas, and stands for a time with uncovered head. Then he proceeds slowly up the hill and kneels beside the double-grave.

Down in the glen is a slight rise in the ground which the peasant farmers quite ignore as they go forward with their preparations for planting corn. Beneath it lie the bones of The Feathered Hen and Wong the "Pacifier." No stone or stupa marks this spot, yet it is known by some, and, at times, the peasants find incense-sticks and ashes of spirit-paper lying by the mound. A skulking figure with a hare-lip and a few others find their way there still craving the aid of these savage souls from out of the land of shades. Far down at the mountain's base, in a vast field of nameless graves, beside the grim execution ground, is another nameless mound. No one knows its identity

though secret servants of a great general have often sought for it diligently. It hides the elements that were once young Chang, the student, the opium-slave, the tyrant, the priest, The Tiger.

Far away in his district-city Pastor Ma, more mature, more wary, still warns the multitude of the devil who, like a roaring lion goes about seeking whom he may devour, and pointing them to One who saves the souls of all who but name His Name. In the crowded capital Evangelist Fuh, also, with fine fervour appeals to masses and classes to live the higher, fuller, nobler life that leads to the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Though their doctrines thus somewhat differ, yet both strive for the triumph of the best desires, the dominance of divine longings, the reign of righteousness and peace and joy throughout the world.

In the same capital city are three happy homes. In one lives General Chang and his wife. He is Military Governor of the great province now, and his home is the scene of many formal functions. Madame Chang finds time to aid in all good work which is inspired by her church and people. The General has never formally joined with her, though he sympathizes much with her convictions. Schooled in youth in the Confucian Classics, he has had scant time in the turmoil of his military life to make careful comparisons as to doctrines. He goes his way an upright, courageous, sincere follower of the great Sage.

The second home is that of their daughter Mae Jen, now Madame Lew. Her time is much engrossed in the care of two tiny, dark-eyed babies who toddle and trot about full of pranks and prattle. Still she finds time for her books, her music and her friends, and many a deed of mercy to those in need. Perchance

her chief concern outside her household is the education of her long-neglected sisters, especially those who live in the far-away mountain-districts where ignorance, toil and suffering so long have reigned supreme.

The third home is a great hospital. Its dwellers are the tens of thousands who yearly pass through its portals, and its staff of foreign and native doctors, dentists, pharmacists and nurses who form its working force. But its heart is a little, heroic soul, the "white nun," who apparently never wearies, working, sacrificing ever and always for her soldier-boys, one of whom—a big figure with scarred nose and lip—is her constant guard. To this service she now adds another. It is the instructing of ever-increasing groups of young men and women trained to spread her mission of healing far and wide among her people. So far she has not married. She probably never will, but her soul is satisfied.

Lew-chee is a brigadier-general now. Under his chief, the Military Governor, it is his duty to travel, near and far, clearing the country of bandit-bands, guarding communications, protecting public enterprises, agriculture and commerce among a far-flung sixty millions of people. He, too, feels he has a mission, but it is not in military prowess. That he is convinced is but a preliminary. The hope of the future he finds in hundreds and thousands of hospitals, schools and churches which are springing up slowly, but surely, in various centres throughout his native land. These are the real forces of reconstruction, he claims, and calls them significantly recruiting grounds for the armies of the higher aspirations. But his interest is not merely academic. Many a lonely outpost

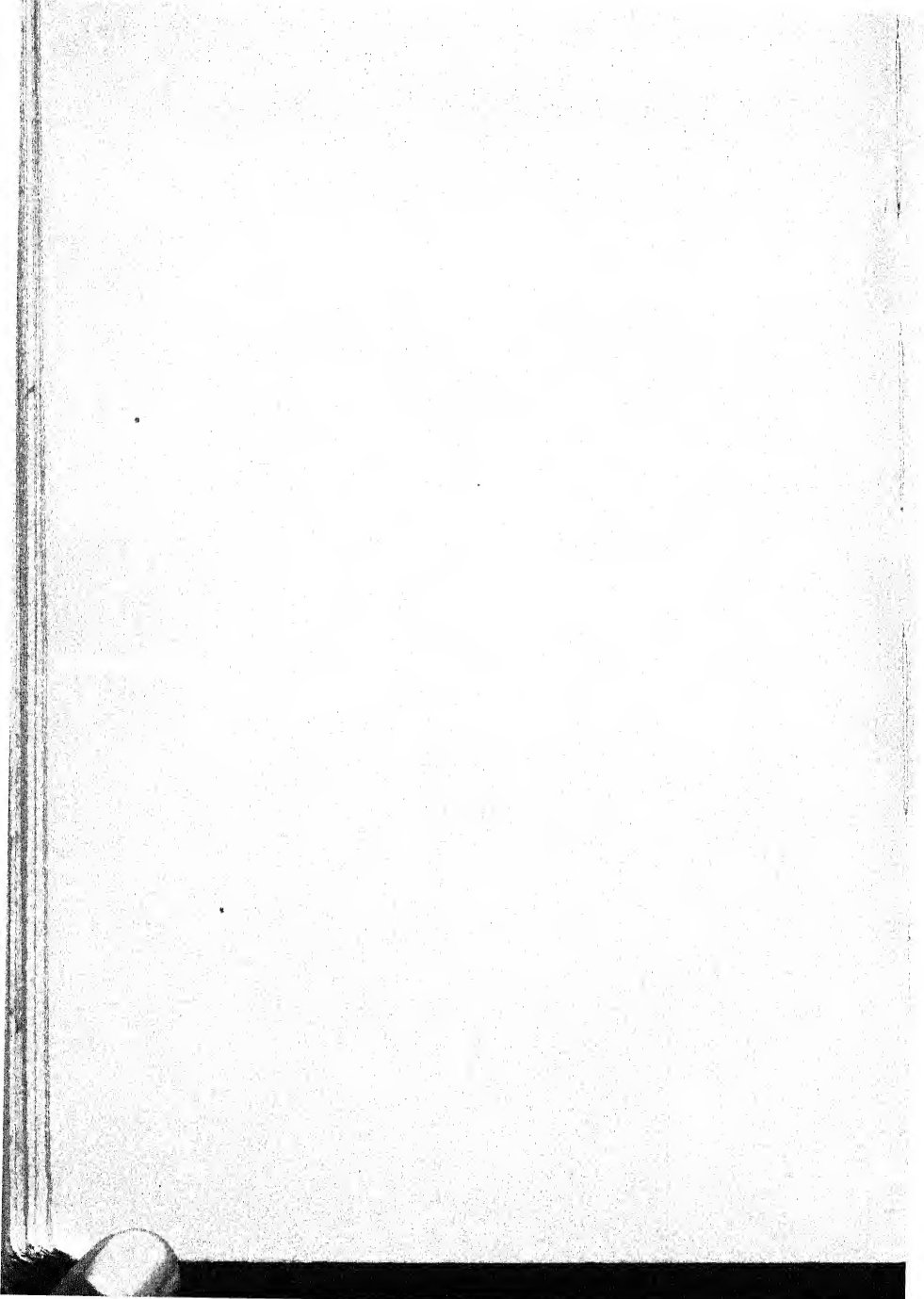
of Christian service has found itself suddenly honoured and helped by his presence and his precepts.

In the great capital he is also a well-known figure. His men are known for their discipline and daring. They would follow their leader to the brink of doom. They are taught not to fight, alone, but to farm, to cobble, to weave, to work in a hundred different forms. Best of all, they are taught the principles of high honour—each man a knight-errant.

When freed from duty the young general likes to ramble at will through hospitals, temple-groves and the busy marts where men play the great game of life. But best of all he loves to gather his wife and two little ones and roam together the grassy lawns and great buildings of the ever-expanding group of Christian colleges. Here he seems to see the source of all progress for his well-loved province. Here, great thoughts, the inheritance of the whole human race through the ages, are gathered together and bestowed upon his land. Here the Mind of the Master is made supreme to flow forth into ever-widening channels of life.

For he is still convinced that victory must some day rest with the more divine desires; that in the long last it will be well with the good; that in the long last it will be ill with the wicked, that in the end righteousness must reign and truth must triumph. It is his creed that thus sometime, somehow, everywhere upon this little green and brown earth of ours, all men, be they yellow or white, black or brown, must, under the leadership of the Lord of Life, sit every man in his own temple, beaming, beneficent and benign.

THE END



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